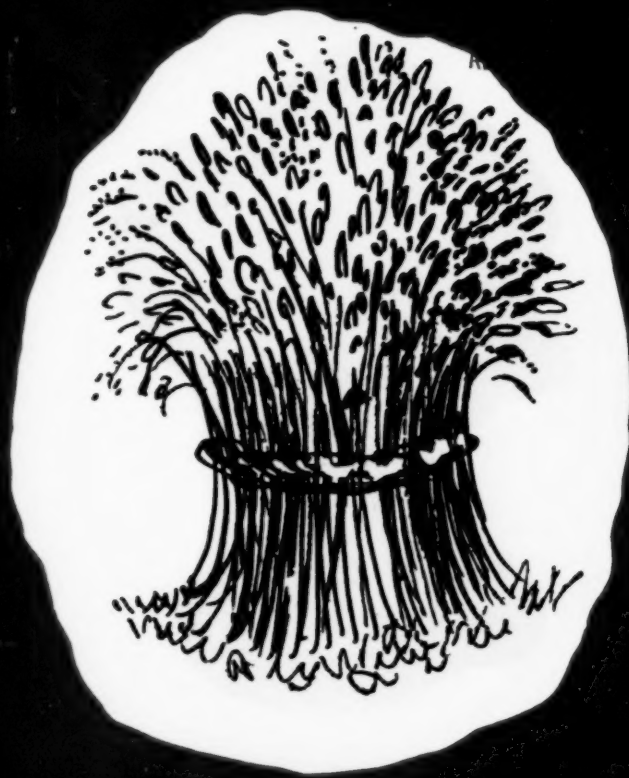


# THE CORNHILL



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Lydia Sokolova

Edited by RICHARD BUCKLE

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25s net

JOHN MURRAY

# THE CORNHILL



No. 1024

Summer 1960

## MAGAZINE

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

### CORNHILL CENTENARY

The Autumn CORNHILL will be a Centenary Number to mark the hundred years of publication.

\* \* \*

Unfortunately it has been found necessary to increase the price of future numbers of the CORNHILL to 3s. 6d. A subscription for the year will cost 16s. od. (overseas 15s. 6d.) and for two years 32s. od. (overseas 31s. od.) including postage. Subscriptions are available from any bookseller or from 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1.

At present the CORNHILL appears quarterly and will publish occasional Supplements containing work of up to 35,000 words in length.

The Editor asks that all contributions should be addressed to him at 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1, and accompanied by a stamped envelope.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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EDWARD R. F. SHEEHAN was for three years American foreign correspondent for *The Boston Globe* and other leading New England newspapers in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. In 1957 he went to Cairo as press officer at the American Embassy and is now press attaché in Beirut.

MARY LOMER published short stories and poems while at Oxford, and won the Avery Hopwood Award for a selection of lyrical poetry in 1955. She taught at the University of Michigan and is now living in England and writing a book.

R. P. LISTER, after taking a science degree, worked in steelworks and in the Ministry of Aircraft Production, but later abandoned metallurgy for writing. He is a contributor of verse and articles to *Punch*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *New Yorker*. His novels are *The Way Backwards* (Collins), *Rebecca Redfern* (Deutsch) and *The Oyster and the Torpedo* (Cape). He has published a book of verse, *The Idle Demon* (Cape), 1958.

J. A. BRAMLEY, after serving in the R.A.F., went to India as a tea-planter and then into business in Calcutta. Later he took Holy Orders and became a naval chaplain. He is a contributor to the *Contemporary Review*, the *Hibbert Journal* and other magazines.

ELSPETH DAVIE studied at Edinburgh University and the College of Art, and taught painting. She has written a number of short stories, one of which was published in *The Observer Prize Stories*, and is now writing a novel.

GORDON MEYER lives in South America and travels widely. He has written a number of articles and stories, and is a contributor to *Blackwood's* and the *London Magazine*. He will shortly be completing a novel.

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## A Weekend with Waugh

BY EDWARD R. F. SHEEHAN

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*Edward R. F. Sheehan, who is now press attaché at the American Embassy in Beirut, was for three years correspondent for the Boston 'Globe' and other New England newspapers, in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. During his visit to Evelyn Waugh at Piers Court, his host told him to 'write anything you like . . .'*

SINCE I was educated systematically in the suspicion of the Lion and of Lloyd George, the idea of actually visiting England had always frightened me a little. When I eventually managed to outgrow my misgivings, it was for a curious if not contradictory reason: I enjoyed reading Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh and wanted to meet them. My pilgrimage was inopportune, for when I reached London I found that Huxley was in California and Greene in Cuba. The only member of my triumvirate geographically accessible was Waugh and he, so everyone said, was Olympian in his aloofness.

Nor did I feel that my credentials would very much impress Waugh. I was a struggling young writer with not much money, attempting to install myself as a foreign correspondent for a group of New England newspapers. I rented a room in an establishment called the Hester House, off Russell Square. I had no friends in London. It was a cold, humid, rainy summer.

There were no alternatives; I had to try my luck with Waugh. He supposedly never even acknowledged requests for interviews, but wouldn't brevity displease him least? I scrawled out a one-line postcard asking whether we might not meet when he next came up to London, and sent it off to Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire, where he was then living.

I was astonished at the promptness of his reply to a proposal so

*A Weekend with Waugh*

casual. His letter had two enclosures : an engraved invitation card and a large printed poster. The invitation read :

MR. & MRS. EVELYN WAUGH

request the honour of your company at a Garden Fete in aid of St. Dominic's Church, Dursley, to be held (weather permitting) on Saturday, August 14th, 3 p.m.-7 p.m. at Piers Court, Stinchcombe, Dursley.

★

Refreshments—Children's Sports—Stalls, Etc.

★

Admission 1/- ; Children 6d. Donations gratefully accepted from those unable to be present.

★

A small but interesting collection of Paintings, mostly Victorian narrative pictures, and of rare books, never previously exhibited, will be on view in the house 4 p.m.-7 p.m. (wet or fine).

Admission 1/-.

The poster said much the same as the invitation, but the letter was in a class by itself :

*Piers Court, Stinchcombe  
Nr. Dursley, Glos.  
August 6th*

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your kind interest in me.

I suggest you change your plans slightly and come here on the fourteenth for the fete. You would find material for an article on a typically English rural event and you could be of great help to us.

We need men of resource to manage traffic, detect thieves, 'bark' at side shows, spend money and judge children's sports. Also in the morning to help erect booths.

Have you any accomplishments other than writing—conjuring, ventriloquism, contortionism—that you would be willing to display ? Can you draw lightning portraits ? We can offer you a bed on the night of the fete and the remains of the refreshment tent. There will

Edward R. F. Sheehan

not be much luncheon or dinner for us that day. Plenty of wine, however, for willing helpers.

Perhaps you play the trumpet? The Stinchcombe Silver Band would welcome a solo while they rest.

Have you a motorcar or do you wish to be met at Stroud?

Yours faithfully,

Evelyn Waugh

Please post attached poster in Grosvenor Square.

I replied by accepting Waugh's invitation and apologised for my lack of experience in ventriloquism, contortionism, and the other lively arts. I volunteered, however, to recite selections from *Finnegans Wake* standing on my head and afterwards to organise the hop-scotch.

'It is good of you to come and help at our fete,' Waugh wrote by return post. 'I presume you are in robust health, in which case you can be of great service on the morning of Saturday erecting booths, carrying pictures, etc. Therefore if it is convenient I suggest your coming Friday evening.'

Waugh seemed to be more in search of a stevedore than in need of a house guest, but his invitation, whatever its motive, did represent the chance to pass an entire weekend with a novelist whose writings I revered. Besides, I was weary of the stale kippers and garrulous landlady at the ghastly Hester House.

An indulgent drama critic on one of the London newspapers had advised me I might soon grow equally weary of what he called Waugh's 'snobbery.' One aspires to many things in the course of a lifetime, and during that rainy British summer I rather fancied I aspired to snobbery. I obediently mounted the poster in Grosvenor Square and then went to Paddington Station and took a train to Gloucestershire.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I cannot remember very much about Waugh's gardener, who met me at Stroud Station, but I do remember the ride in the twilight to Waugh's house in Stinchcombe. The deep valleys of Gloucestershire meet at Stroud, and then the town climbs the abrupt Cotswold hills. When we reached the high grassy ridge of the Cotswold, stretching before us was the wide valley of the Severn River. The sun had

*A Weekend with Waugh*

set ; some horses were grazing near the road, their dark silhouettes outlined against a backwash of purple light.

It was nearly dark by the time we turned into the drive. There, looming before us, was Waugh's Georgian manor. The gardener left me alone on the front doorstep and drove off. I rang the bell more than once and waited. Finally I tried the door and found it locked. I began to feel—to borrow a phrase from Malcolm Muggeridge—like a letter delivered to the wrong address. Just then the door opened and I found confronting me a rather round, rubicund man in a red smoking jacket.

"Mr. Sheehan, I should imagine?" Evelyn Waugh put an oversized cigar back into his mouth and extended his hand. A sharp-nosed but attractive woman came out of the drawing-room and Waugh introduced her as Laura, his wife. Before I could exchange pleasantries with her, Waugh had picked up my luggage and started up the stairs. "Come along," he said, "I'll show you your room. I say, your bag is rather heavy, perhaps you'd better lend a hand. What have you got inside?"

Nothing unusual, I indicated, beyond some books and a carton or two of cigarettes.

"Cigarettes," he repeated. "Cigarettes! Well, here we are. This is your room. Unlike your overheated American homes, we have no central heating in this house, so I imagine you will have to get along without it. Now, do you want some supper?"

"No, I had something a little after six," I said. "I mean, I thought you would have dined already."

"My dear fellow, dine at six o'clock? We never dine at six o'clock here. We'll be waiting for you downstairs, where you can have something to eat when you are ready to join us. *Six o'clock!*"

My chamber, the master guest-room, was large, old-fashioned, and comfortable. The bed was lavishly canopied, the canopy generously tasselled. In a corner of the room stood an enormous Victorian washstand, an impressive monstrosity elaborately decorated with metal work and mosaic. In the adjoining bathroom was a more conventional basin with a gaping hole in it. On the basin was painted the simple inscription '*Mrs. Grant: her mark.*'

There was a knock at the door. I opened it to find a lean, red-

headed young man. "Oh hello. I'm Auberon Waugh. Should the housekeeper heat hot water or will you draw your bath cold? Also do you prefer your fish boiled or broiled?"

"Well, if you don't mind I'll take my bath cold and my fish boiled," I said with some uncertainty, fearful lest taking them any other way might have bordered on the savage.

The Waughs and the eldest of their six children were waiting in the drawing-room. They may not have eaten at six, but they had eaten, and I picked at my fish self-consciously while they quietly surveyed me.

Waugh sat opposite me, on the edge of the divan, nursing a brandy. Contemplating him, I tried to imagine him in his youth, for in the back of my mind was the description, made by one of his earlier Boswells, of a radiant young man of sensuous mouth, splendid eyes large and set far apart, and 'hyacinthine locks of hair.' I thought that if age had not faded such features neither had she disciplined them. His reddish hair he still has in abundance, but mere ruddiness has replaced radiance in his face. Most remarkable now are surely his eyes, which alternately dart, distend, and wander far, far from under the arched eyebrows which so sparsely frame them. The plump unity of his features, the large head resting on a short, comfortable frame, somehow combine to give him an almost elfish look.

The remarkable eyes came out of their far-away gaze and focused sharply on me.

"Where are you from?" Waugh asked.

"From Boston," I said.

"I have been there."

"The politics are interesting there." I was trying to make conversation.

"You like politics?" he asked, apparently intrigued.

"I love politics," I said, plunging forward.

"I loathe politics," he rejoined. "Please change the subject."

Throwing out the first thought that came to me, I told him about an American woman I met in Florence who could talk of nothing but her dog. Hoping to get him started off on any kind of tangent, I asked him why middle-aged women talked so much of dogs.



*A Weekend with Waugh*

"Why, old boy," Waugh said, "it's obviously to keep you from talking about politics!"

The remark did not put me at my ease, but at least it meant Waugh was shifting into second gear. He now let out the clutch on one of his favourite subjects. "You Americans," he said. "What an extraordinary breed you are! And by the way, what extraordinary questions you ask. While on my lecture tour in your country, the enquiry most often directed at me was whether or not I slept in the nude."

"In America it's sex or money," I conceded, expressing surprise that in his case it was not the size of his royalties they asked about.

"On the contrary," he said, "the problem was not their avarice but mine. They could not meet my price. In Hollywood, I was offered \$125,000 for the cinema rights to *Brideshead Revisited*, but even that was not enough for what they wanted in return. I did not see how they could cast the same man as nineteen years old in one frame and then as thirty-two in another—unless of course they took a nineteen-year-old and waited thirteen years to finish the film. Your Hollywood people are not as patient as I, so there we were, high and dry."

Waugh was no more indulgent about the state of England than he was about the state of Beverly Hills. As the evening progressed many of the kingdom's greatest names, best known novelists, newest plays, and nearly all the practices and preferences peculiar to its modern epoch became victims of his exquisite disdain.

". . . Oh yes, she showed up *here* once. We got rid of *her* in a hurry, didn't we? . . . You remember, old girl," he addressed his wife, "when he cornered me that Saturday afternoon in White's—don't ask me how he got in—waving the manuscript of his new play in my face like a regimental flag. I had to be left in peace, so I glanced at a few pages and then told him that either one of us was illiterate or gobbledegook had become a language. The play ran three seasons in New York. . . ."

Waugh's judgments produced occasional chuckles among the children and uncritical silence from Mrs. Waugh, a woman of few words who seemed to accept those of her husband with a serenity that bordered on adoration. The conversation eventually drifted



to the fete, and I asked Waugh why of all people he, who so valued his privacy, should be opening his home to the public. "Why dear boy," he said, "because St. Dominic's Church is in financial need and because the parish is part of our simple way of life here." Rising, he went to the corner of the room and pulled down a wall map of Piers Court, which he beckoned me to examine. At first I thought it unusual that an estate of only some few acres should require mapping out; but as he murmured again "way of life," I thought I understood.

Waugh's new reverie was interrupted by Theresa, his teen-aged, red-haired daughter. "Where are we going to put Teddy tomorrow?" she asked. They had already begun calling me Teddy.

"I think we'll put Teddy in the car-park," said Waugh. "Teddy will do splendidly in the car-park. We have the special headpiece for him."

"Headpiece?" interjected Auberon. "Papa, you're not going to make Teddy wear *that*."

"Yes, the headpiece," Waugh replied cryptically. Little I said from then on raised a shadow of interest in Waugh's face—his family seemed amused at the magnitude of my inability to stir him from his daydreams—until I mentioned Graham Greene's letter in the *Manchester Guardian*.

"What letter in the *Guardian*?" Waugh came quickly back to life.

"Greene has written to the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris," I explained, "protesting the denial of a Church burial to Colette, and the *Guardian* has a story about it on the back page."

"Why, the man is mad," Waugh exclaimed. "The man is mad. I love Graham, but he is mad. I remember once when he came down here from London for a visit. The family were all away. Graham and I were both working and we met only at meals. Then I discovered that for hours Graham would disappear from the house. When I finally asked him what he was doing, he explained that he could not write another word until a certain combination of numbers—I think it was 987, something like that—appeared to him by accident. He was spending all his time by the roadside waiting for those numbers to pass on a licence plate. He could not write another line until he saw them. Well, it is a poor country road, and there are not many motorcars. Graham had a long wait."

### *A Weekend with Waugh*

We retired for the night on that note. To-morrow was the fete and there was a long day's work ahead. "There will be a great deal to do in the car-park, Teddy. And with your headpiece you will be the paragon of the day."

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Saturday dawned a morning of alternating showers and sunshine. Waugh said he had a whole convent of Poor Clares praying it would be fine for the fete, and throughout the morning it was nip and tuck. Until the very hour of the fete—three o'clock—we were not to know who would gain the day, the Poor Clares or the Powers of Darkness.

The Waugh family were having breakfast as I entered the dining-room, smoking a cigarette. "Now come here, Teddy, sit down and have something, and get rid of that blasted cigarette!" Waugh leaped out of his chair, seized the lighted cigarette from my mouth, opened the window, and threw it out.

We ate a substantial country breakfast of fruit, bread, sausage, ham and eggs, and tea, served by the Waugh's matronly cook. Then I asked Auberon, a good-natured lad, if he would show me around the 'park.' This mellow, rambling, tree-girt house was enhanced without by a manicured front lawn, a miniature mock Greek temple, and classic statuettes in various poses. In the rear, there were hen coops, lamb coops, and pig pens. A rolling side stretch of luxuriant grass rising into a hillock was to serve as the car-park for the afternoon.

Bron (Auberon) took me first to the Greek temple diagonally facing the front of the house, a garden Acropolis with the torsos, stumps, and heads of Ionic columns deposited about in contrived Romantic decadence. But the temple was not nearly as intriguing as the mystery of 'The Edifice' (so Bron called it) toward the rear of the house. The Edifice was a complex of pillared, classical walls about five feet high, an ornate obstacle course without roof, pediment, or apparent purpose. Surmounting the walls were seven small statues. "What do the statues represent?" I asked Bron. "They are the seven virtues," he said. "Oh? Temperance? Chastity——?" "No," he answered cryptically, "they are the seven minor virtues." To this day I do not know the identity of the seven

minor virtues, for when I re-entered the house and asked Waugh, he mumbled something about my limbering up for the car-park and placed a broom in my hand.

Mrs. Waugh was already running around in faded blue jeans. This was not out of character, for she was the day-to-day manager of the physical establishment.

I had Victorian books to rearrange for exhibit in the library, ladders to climb, rugs to roll up, and electric lights to move. Waugh allowed electricity at Piers Court, but no radio. He finally installed a telephone, but most of the time refused to answer it. He does not own a gramophone, for he claims he cannot understand music, not even the classics. As for television, he said he had never heard of it. For Waugh, progress means something more than sitting-room electronics and bathroom plastics. It means a whole new nineteenth century.

Nowhere among Waugh's possessions was the nineteenth century more affectionately enshrined than in his collection of Victorian-epoch narrative pictures, some tragic, some satirical, some otherworldly, each telling a story of its own. 'The Prince and His Friends'—a caricature by Max Beerbohm of King Edward VII and his entourage—was one of these. Three paintings respectively depicted travel during the last three centuries. A journey aboard a Victorian railway carriage was benevolently joyful, but fierce highwaymen were shown as still at large during the eighteenth century, and representing the twentieth were the hysterical passengers of a crash-bound modern airship. "They are all doomed," chuckled Waugh, and lit up another cigar.

Despite all the shifting around the exhibition required of Waugh's treasures, he was never in any doubt about where to put what. He seemed to have predestined the position of each object as he would a character in one of his novels—each occupying its proper place, some ordained to attract great attention, others to play supporting or only incidental rôles. Waugh assigned a protagonist's prominence to the monstrosity—the Victorian washstand. "Get Bron to help you, and place it on the landing of the stairs," he decreed. Negotiating the marble monument around banisters to its place of honour was no easy task, and Waugh's directions hardly helped.

"Watch the corner, Teddy!—wouldn't want to stick you with a replastering bill. Ah, that's it. Splendid!"

### *A Weekend with Waugh*

The rarest collector's item of the day, however, was not exhibited and Waugh's decision to conceal it from public view struck me as unworthy of his comic genius. I refer to The Commode, an immense armchair repositorium upholstered completely in leopard skin. Only the great perforation amidships betrayed this specimen for what it was.

Toward midday the heavy work was done. Waugh poured himself a gin and bitters. Then Bron, rather out of breath, broke in on us.

"Papa," he said, "there's the nicest young American down at the gate. He's all by himself and it's still hours before the fete. What shall we do with him?" The gate had been locked until the appointed hour, a young sentinel posted before it.

Waugh poured himself another gin. "Teddy," he turned to me, "go down with Bron to the gate and look this fellow over. If he's acceptable, invite him to luncheon. If he's not, get rid of him."

On the way down the path, Bron and I devised the signal system to be implemented when I had decided whether or not the stranger was up to snuff. We decided I would engage him in a brief discussion of Waugh's works (something I hadn't dare do with Waugh) and if I mentioned *Vile Bodies* Bron was to invite him in.

The stranger at the gate turned out to be a young fellow with horn-rimmed spectacles from the American Embassy in London, an articulate chap called Conley. Conley was a Waugh worshipper who not only had read everything his idol had written but had left London that morning at an impossible hour because there was only one train. "I didn't want to miss the opportunity of meeting him for the first time," he said. "I'm sorry to be so premature."

"Don't worry," I replied, "I don't think he'll consider you a vile body."

Bron carried the motion. "I say, won't you come to luncheon?" Three other early birds, all old ladies, we left behind to reflect on the large notice posted at the gate:

#### NO ADMITTANCE ON BUSINESS

Waugh was waiting for us in front of the house. No sooner had I introduced him to Conley than Father Collins of St. Dominic's, Dursley, came up the drive in his car. Father Collins opened his door, and several glass jars of peppermints fell with a crash to the

ground. The infant Waughs, a few of their countryside chums, Bron, and Mr. Conley bent down to clean them up.

"Don't bother," Waugh counselled Conley. "We have plenty of child labour here. Besides, your services will be put to better use in the scullery."

"But the broken glass is mixed in with the sweets," Conley observed.

"That is no reason for throwing them away," Waugh retorted, "and any casualties will be for a worthy cause."

At a quarter to three it was raining again, and all the outdoor games seemed doomed. Waugh's resignation bordered on mysticism. "The Poor Clares are praying for good weather," he said, "and it will be fine." The weather was as good as his word, for at five minutes to three, when he told everyone to "man your battle stations" it had rained for the last time that day.

"All ready, Teddy? Then follow me. We must dress you up in your headpiece first."

I followed Waugh to the room that sheltered the leopard-skin commode, the only place downstairs not rearranged for the fete. From a wooden cabinet Waugh extracted a gleaming metal object. "Teddy, this is your headpiece," he said. "How formidable you will look in the car-park!" The headpiece was a German helmet of Franco-Prussian War vintage, complete with spike. How it sparkled in the new sunlight that now illumined the room, how it bathed me in reflected glory as only a brass hat can! And the spike! It looked as long and sharp as a bayonet.

"No thank you," I said.

"Why, what on earth do you mean?"

I told Waugh he would have to impale me on that spike before he would ever get me to wear it publicly on my head.

"My dear boy," he protested, "do you realise what this means? You are trying to deprive the fete of one of its prime attractions—a unicorn in the car-park."

But Waugh was not beaten. In the moist green grass of the car-park, that afternoon, a unicorn grazed. It wore horn-rimmed spectacles and attracted much attention. Conley made a good unicorn.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *A Weekend with Waugh*

The fete was on. With Conley replacing me in the car-park, I was temporarily at large. The visitors swarmed over the grounds of Piers Court; they queued into the house and then came popping out of it like tweed peas from a Georgian pod. Waugh did not at first mingle with them. Not that they were all unworthy of that honour, for a lot of distinguished and dashing people had come down from London and not a few members of the 'old' nobility were there.

The Lord of the Manor of Stinchcombe was enthroned in the Greek temple, attired, not in the loud country tweeds he is famous for, but in a bourgeois dark grey suit. There was a great deal of activity outside the house. When Waugh eventually caught sight of me in the crowd, he beckoned to me, told me the sideshows required my services, and assigned me to peddling home-made muffins to the younger set. Laura Waugh was operating the cardboard roulette wheel and Father Collins supervised the secondhand bookstall, where a book on the Pope lay alongside *The India-rubber Man*, by Edgar Wallace. Virginia was reading palms and Bron ran a stall where the maladjusted were allowed, for a penny a throw, to vent their hatred of human society by heaving rocks at old chinaware.

Music was provided by the Stinchcombe Silver Band, inadvertently syncopated by Pepsi-Cola being popped open all over the lot. An ensemble resplendently dressed in blue and red, the Silver Band puffed its way through an unfamiliar repertoire in which each member seemed to be applying his own private theory of melody. A mysterious tent labelled 'The Holy Friar' intrigued me terribly, but so busy was I marketing my muffins and so long was the queue outside I could not get into it.

Waugh was so pleased that he descended into the crowd and parked himself on the front doorstep. An enormous woman waddled up to him.

"How old is this house?" she demanded.

"Madam," Waugh said quietly, "the part you're looking at is Georgian, and it's 150 years old."

"Well," she snorted, "I have a Georgian house that's 300 years old!"

Next came Douglas Woodruff, editor of the distinguished Catholic London *Tablet*, and himself not an unimpressive human monument.



"What do you think of the new Greene letter?" Waugh enquired.  
"What's this?" asked Woodruff, puzzled. "What Greene letter?"

"You mean you haven't heard?" Waugh said condescendingly.  
"I thought *everybody* had." Beating out a man like Woodruff with a morsel of this kind was enough to put Waugh in his finest fettle that weekend.

At about 4.30, the crush of visitors on the lawns and those queueing up to get inside the house had reached its peak. Suddenly, past the constable at the gate whose duty it was to detour all vehicles to the car-park, up the path scattering minor poets and dowager duchesses, past the Holy Friar's tent and to the very door of the mansion came a chauffeur-driven Baby Austin. The door swung open, and as though a mouse had brought forth a mountain, out stepped a gentleman with a pink, boiled face and long red hair. He wore a bright yellow shirt, a suede jacket, pearl-grey trousers, and sneakers. In one hand he held an anthology of poetry almost the size of an encyclopedia and over his other arm he carried a bright leather bag of Polyphemic dimensions.

"Good heavens," Waugh murmured, "it's Quentin Davenport!"

The new arrival surveyed the premises, muttered something to himself, consulted his book of verse, and delved into his leather bag. Then he came in for a landing on the front doorstep, where he was stopped abruptly by Waugh.

"Look here, old boy, you can't come into this house until I see what's inside that bag."

"Damned cheek," fumed the visitor. "Leave my bag out of this."

"You have your choice, sir," Waugh said. "Open up the bag or stay out of the house."

Still protesting, the newcomer opened the bag and Waugh rummaged around inside it.

"What's inside?" I asked.

"A bottle of whiskey and some dirty handkerchiefs," Waugh revealed.

The bag incident did not do a great deal to improve the newcomer's humour, and once within the house he began to consult his bottle

### *A Weekend with Waugh*

as frequently as his verse. To everyone who enquired after his identity, Waugh would only reply :

"His name is Davenport. He belongs to an old Catholic family and was sent down from the University for writing a blasphemous poem."

Mr. Davenport could not find very much in Waugh's house that he liked, and he made no effort to keep his opinions to himself. He was not impressed with the library, nor with Waugh's rare illuminated books, the fruit of twenty years of collecting. Repton's architectural masterpiece *Brighton Pavilion*, Pyne's *Royal Residences*, some volumes on the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park, the illuminated Victorian psalters, the chromolithographic folios of the mid-nineteenth century—all of these Waugh had described as depicting "a great turning point in the history of industrial design and domestic decoration."

"Balderdash," said Mr. Davenport. "Ho ! Ho ! Look at that one ! Rare, he says. I've seen six like it in Charing Cross !" The *Shakespeare Gallery* (some engravings done in 1805 by Boydell), Bickman's eighteenth-century, copper-engraved *Universal Penman*, four high pedestals cut down to pilaster size, and an elephant-foot wastebasket, Mr. Davenport reviled as "rubbish and rot of imperial capacity."

In the drawing-room hung a painting labelled 'An Afternoon on the River,' by Augustus Egg, R.A., the first patron of the pre-Raphaelites. Hearing some of the visitors speculate on whether it was an early Egg or a late Egg, Mr. Davenport quivered his nostrils and assured them "it is obviously a poached Egg, left too long lying about."

When the car-park began to disgorge the motorcars and people began to head back to London, I went into the room of the leopard-skin commode, where I found Conley having a drink with Waugh. I reminded Conley there were no more trains to London that night and that if he wanted to ask for a lift back only a few cars remained. Whereupon Waugh grabbed him by the arm and said, "Come along, Mr. Conley !" Before Conley knew what had happened, Waugh had dragged him out of Piers Court and down the rolling front lawn. From a distance I could see an Austin trundling down the path. Waugh, planting himself firmly in the middle of the path, raised



his hand. The vehicle screeched to a halt. Waugh flung open the rear door and a spirited discussion followed between Waugh and the owner of the motorcar. Even from the front lawn it was apparent that Conley did not want to get into the car, and it seemed that the occupant was as reluctant about accepting Conley's company. Waugh settled the dispute by stuffing Conley into the Austin, patting the roof as one might pat the head of a stray dog one wants off the premises, and sent it on its way.

"What did you do with Mr. Conley?" I asked Waugh as he came back up the path.

"I put him in the motorcar with that horrible man going to Bath," Waugh said.

"But Bath is not in the direction of London."

"I know."

\* \* \* \* \*

Champagne was served that evening before supper. I helped Waugh bring the bottles and crystal glasses into the dining-room. I loosened one of the corks and left the bottle on the table. Soon there was an explosion, and for an instant I thought Conley had returned to murder Waugh for putting him in the car with Mr. Davenport. But it was only the champagne cork. The champagne began to fizz over onto the table and clumsily I tried to stop it with the palm of my hand.

"Pour it, you silly ass!" Waugh shouted.

Wiping up the spilled champagne, I remembered a similar embarrassment Waugh himself was said to have experienced when he accidentally splashed port on a superior officer during his wartime sojourn in Yugoslavia (a mission from which he returned insisting Tito was a woman). "People who can't be careful shouldn't drink," complained the officer. "I do not intend," Waugh replied, "to abandon the habit of a lifetime to appease your temporary displeasure."

But no such rejoinder occurred to me, and still flustered, I forgot to stop smoking when we sat down to dinner. Waugh's eyes popped out of his head. Before I could marshal my presence of mind, he took the cigarette out of my hand and crushed it.

*A Weekend with Waugh*

"Papa," Theresa complained presently. "I caught Teddy talking politics with Mrs. Potter."

"You did?" Waugh asked. "Who is Mrs. Potter?"

"Why, Papa, you remember. She's the Archbishop's sister. Mummy relieved her of three and tuppence at the roulette."

"Oh yes. I recall talking to her before she went into the Holy Friar's tent. She was still unaware of the nature of our Holy Friar, and I believe she thought we had hired a bogus monk to hear unauthorised confessions."

"I never did get inside that tent," I said. "Who *was* the Holy Friar?"

"The Holy Friar was an old frying pan, perforated in the centre and suspended on a string," Waugh revealed.

"Evelyn," Mrs. Waugh interjected, "I feel badly about Mr. Conley. I feel dreadfully guilty about the way you put poor Conley into the motorcar with Mr. Davenport." Everybody began to feel badly about Conley.

"Teddy, will you go to early or late church tomorrow?" Waugh asked. Then he smiled mischievously. "Mr. Davenport belongs to an old Catholic family, and was sent down from the University for writing a blasphemous poem. I wonder what will happen to Conley. . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

I awoke the next morning, not on my own initiative, but because Waugh was standing below my open window calling, "*Teddy for early church,*" through a megaphone. I understand he has since been neglecting this instrument in favour of a Victorian ear trumpet, which he brandishes at literary luncheons.

For the ride to church, Waugh did not have a horse-drawn victoria, but he did have the next best thing; a Ford station wagon so old even his family complained about it. With Mrs. Waugh driving—and her cigar-flourishing husband managing to make the dowdy back seat more aristocratic simply by sitting on it—we were soon on our way to hear one of Father Collins' earnest sermons and to collect the Sunday morning papers for the reviews of the fete. (Waugh was disappointed: the rural editions did not carry any.) When we

returned to Piers Court, Waugh showed me a letter from a back issue of *The Times* which observed that 'one refrains from smoking at meals as a matter of elementary courtesy.'

Waugh and his wife drove me to the station that afternoon. We were a good twenty-five minutes early for my train and they waited with me. This gave Waugh the opportunity to examine my somewhat weather-beaten grey hat, which lay atop my luggage. He was nearly as critical of my hat as Mr. Davenport had been of his house.

"You puzzle me, Teddy. You refused to appear in our car-park in a handsome headpiece but you are prepared to walk the streets of London in this hat. Most extraordinary."

"What would you have me wear?" I asked.

"Buy a bowler."

It was his parting shot, for when the train came and he helped me with my luggage, he said simply, "It's been great fun. You must write to us. I hope you can come again sometime." I thought I detected a trace of whimsical affection in his good-bye.

As I catnapped in the train, the kaleidoscope of the weekend passed before me as the panorama of a man's life is said to pass before him at the moment before death. I saw Victorian washstands, boiled fish, and the poached Egg. Chromolithographic folios and the leopard-skin commode. Spilled champagne, anonymous statues, and elephant-foot wastebaskets.

But I never saw Waugh again. And to my two or three letters came the same reply printed on a postcard: "Mr. Evelyn Waugh is abroad. His letters are not being forwarded. They will be dealt with on his return."

The postcards were addressed in his own hand.

## *The Limited Share*

BY MARY LOMER

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AT first I felt as if I had been driving through a red sandstorm for days, so that whenever I swallowed, or rubbed my hands through my hair, or even yawned, I could feel the grit of the dust against me. I was travelling across the continent, and this was my first trip west of New York, where I had been spending the year. Everything I saw now was so strange, so vast, that I felt I could not take it all in. The contrast between this and the small English landscapes I knew was the difference between a sprawling mural and a placid miniature. Here, the road was a great track cut through the Nevada hills, which hemmed me in with desert scrub and sage, those flat-topped hills with the dust-bowls between them. For the first time I realised what people meant when they talked of the hostility of the western deserts, and the loneliness of places where man has never been important. I was glad when the engine of my old car began to give trouble so I could have an excuse to break my journey, even if it were just to talk to someone. So far the only people I had met, or rather, had had contact with, were the motel owners with whom I spent the nights, and with whom I felt more than ever a thing of no consequence, a passer-through, as weightless as a grain of sand itself.

The gas station where I stopped was not particularly inviting. It stood on a lonely stretch of road, on a flat plain, where the wind gathered the dead soil in clouds. A few miles before, I had passed the end of a government-owned section, miles of it enclosed in barbed wire, so that one felt that one was driving through a concentration camp. But this garage was not entirely isolated; its twin stood on the other side of the road, two buildings facing each other, exactly alike, one dealing presumably with west-bound traffic, the other with east. I thought it would give me some kind of link with home

if I crossed the road and dealt with the one that handled the east-bound travellers. They, at least, would have the anticipation of cities and theatres and people. This little outpost of humanity, with its petrol pump and its galvanised shack labelled 'rest room,' suddenly seemed to offer the last hope of a link with civilisation.

"Boiling over, then?" said the man who came to look at the engine.

He was short and fat, about sixty, still vigorous, but with the sort of vigour which has passed its prime. He spoke with an accent that at first I did not recognise, partly because I do not have a good ear for that sort of thing, partly because it was so familiar I did not expect to find it here, the rise and lilt of a Cornish voice, joined now to a new harshness, the softness of a West Country diction with the sharpness of the American tongue. "Where do you fellows pick up these old cars?" I should have known his nationality then from the way he looked at me sideways, his Celtic eyes dark and wary, watching if I would take offence. Instead, I laughed, and leaving him with the car walked into the café part of the building. It was littered with tawdry reminders of the rest of the world, cheap junk to impress the tourist, but because I had expected this I did not mind. I lit a cigarette and wondered why I had ever left New York. But there was one interesting picture on the wall, a photograph of a mushroom-shaped cloud rolling over the countryside. I leaned forward to study it.

"Not bad, eh?" said the owner, coming past me. He stood by the counter, wiping his hands on an oily rag. "I took that myself one morning. You should have seen the real thing. Woom! Off she went. The whole air shook. I'm telling you I was glad I was out of the way up here. That car of yours is a real crock."

"When did it go off?" I asked.

"Let's see." He counted on his fingers. "Three, four months ago. Lots of men from there used to come up here. And didn't us have a good time then. Plenty of money, plenty of beer, plenty of laughs. They'd be up here every night, playing that old juke box 'til she shook, and all the while, down there, building that thing during the day. The 'A' bomb they calls it; I call it the 'O.K.' bomb."

*The Limited Share*

He laughed at his own joke.

"Isn't it lonely round here?" I asked, drinking a beer gratefully.

He laughed again, his unshaved jaws shaking, as if I had said the funniest thing in the world.

"Lonely," he said. "I suppose you might think so. Nothing to do except go over to Mac's there and drink his beer, and he come over here to drink mine. A share and share alike, with no one to worry you, and all the time in the world. I'd not give anything for it, not even a pint of good cider."

It was then I recognised where he was from, and told him something about myself. He asked a few questions, but I had the feeling that he did not want to speak about England, and looked uncomfortable when I talked about 'going home.' He seemed perfectly content where he was, and whatever Cornwall had been to him it had now retreated to some far part of his mind and memory as if it had never existed.

"And what about this car of yourn?" he asked. "Aren't you worried about it?"

I saw that this was his way of telling me that he was not interested in talking over old times with an ex-patriot.

"Yes," I said, coming back to reality. "What's wrong with it, anyhow? Anything serious?"

"The radiator's had it!" he said cheerfully.

"Ye gods. What's to be done?"

"Now you let me see what I can do," he said, soothing me. "Me and Mac'll work at it. Now there's a chap that's some clever with his hands. He can fix anything. We'll get something done in a couple of hours. You can wait that long, eh?"

"And if I can't?" I asked.

"I'd say you'd break down five miles from here and walk back," he said. He still had the West Country puckishness about him that I liked.

"Well, you do the best you can," I said. "And I'll wait." If I had to stop somewhere I felt I might have chosen worse places after all.

"You'd better get something to eat," he said. Before I could answer he drew back a curtain and shouted into the dim recess beyond.

*Mary Lomer*

It seemed very cool and dark back there. I sat on my stool, studying the photograph on the wall. How strange, I was thinking, that the only way man can leave his mark here is by absolute and utter violence, by a tearing asunder of the ground that remains so indifferent to him. And yet, this Cornishman, whom I could imagine now in corduroy trousers and pipe in some deep-banked lane, he seems quite content to be living here; he seems to have made this his home.

Engrossed in my thoughts, I did not see the girl until she had come to stand behind the counter. She was a magnificent creature. It was hard to estimate her age; she might have been sixteen or thirty-six, but she was in the flower of her beauty. It shone from her like a halo, making you feel you must enjoy it because you sensed you might never see its like again. She was tall, and when she moved her body slid under her brief cotton dress like a skein of golden silk. Yet she did not walk provocatively, rather, she moved as if she were unconscious of the effect she created. Her feet were bare and her long toes were caked with dust. She was carrying a paper magazine in her hand.

"You put that away," he told her; "you leave those there books alone."

With a shrug, she leaned over to place the magazine back in the stand, and for a second I had a full glimpse of her heavy breasts and was enveloped in the warm feminine smell of her flesh.

"This gentleman would like something to eat," he went on. "What've you got for him?"

She went back behind the curtain. He nudged me when she was gone. "What do you think of my girl?"

"She's lovely," I said, not saying of course what I was really thinking, that if he still might fit into his native landscape, she certainly would not. She was one more of the surprises the desert had to offer.

She did not return, but called something through the curtain.

"If there're no pasties," I said, "I'll stick to coffee, black."

"O.K.," he said, refusing to be drawn into conversation again. "Just coffee," he shouted to the girl, and went to the door. Outside the dry heat of the desert lay like a weight; you could feel it beating against the walls and roof of the building.



### *The Limited Share*

"Hey, Mac, Mac," I heard him shouting to his friend across the road.

Then there was silence. Suddenly I remembered a day in western England when my car had broken down in a small village, and I had had to wait, much as I was doing now. I had spent the afternoon sleeping under the beech trees, while a cheerful Devonshire mechanic had mended a burst tyre. How strange that on the other side of the world I should find myself in a similar situation, with similar people—strange yet comforting.

The girl brought back my coffee, placing the cup clumsily in front of me, so that the liquid slopped over into the saucer. She dabbed at it with a scrap of cloth, then leaned back, watching me. I felt very tense as I drank slowly. The coffee tasted bitter and was already cold, but I dared not complain.

"You coming from the coast?" she asked me abruptly. "What's it like there, by the sea?" She had a different accent, harder, American.

"Well," I said, "I'm going there, actually. It's my first visit."

"Where you from?" Her questioning was like a child's, direct and inoffensive.

"From New York now," I said; "before that, from England."

Her eyes grew round. "That's where he's from." With a jerk of her head she indicated the two men outside.

"Yes, I know. From Cornwall," I said. "Perhaps you'll go back one day."

"Oh, he likes it too much here," she said, pushing her hair back pettishly. "Now those airmen who were here, they told me lots about the coast. Say, does the sea roll all the time?"

"It does on the east coast," I said, laughing. "I expect it does on the west too."

"They said there were beaches around L.A. where you could swim all day, with nice restaurants, and places to dance and all," she said. "That'd be nice. Are you going there?"

"No," I said. "Just to San Francisco. But that's supposed to be more lovely than Los Angeles. The Bay is one of the world's beauty spots."

But I felt she was not listening to me, for she had begun to hum



*Mary Lomer*

to herself as she picked up my cup and saucer. When she was not trying, her movements were graceful and relaxed. I noticed how her bare toes were tracing a complicated rhythm on the floor.

"But L.A.'s where all the movies are made," she said. "Say, I'd like to be a star one day. You think I got the figure for it?" She pivoted in front of me. "I look older, but I'm only twenty. Thirty-eight, twenty-two, thirty-four, the same as Miss America. Her picture's in all those books. Do you think"—she looked at me sharply—"do you think I'd do well out there?"

Once more I found myself overpowered by the musk scent of her body, by the insistence of her presence.

"I suppose so," I said, stuttering over the 's' sound. She began to smile, showing her white teeth. She seemed pleased at what seemed to me a very ungallant approval.

"Ha, cha cha," she hummed, as she wiped the counter. "I wish you were going to L.A.," she said suddenly. "I wish you were."

"I'm sorry," I began, but she continued to stare at me as if she were wanting to make me change my mind.

"What's going on in here?" a man's voice said. It was a cold, desperate sort of voice. I wheeled around. A young man was standing in the doorway, his paternity stamped in his dark eyes, his black hair, his suspicious glance. He looked as Cornish as his father must have done as a young man. "What's going on?" he repeated. I had a premonition that he could be dangerous. In him, strength had not yet run to fat; he effused nervous energy.

He came towards me, eyeing me contemptuously, I thought, when he saw my coat and tie, and the foreign cut of my trousers, the citified pallor of my skin.

"We were just talking," I said lamely enough, "your sister and I."

"Huh?" he said, straddling a stool at the other end of the counter and reaching for a magazine. The girl had already left us. I felt embarrassed and in the way, as if, in truth, something had been going on. I got up from the counter and went outside. The bonnet of the car was up and the two men were looking at the engine. I stood waiting uncertainly. Everyone seemed to have something to do, some part to play. I was glad when the father heaved himself up. He gave his great chuckle when he saw me watching them.

### *The Limited Share*

"You're lucky, you are," he said. "Mac here thinks he can mend it. Marvellous with his hands he is."

Mac was a tall thin man, with sandy hair bleached by the sun. He was lean-faced, thin-lipped, quite different from his partner. He nodded at me without smiling. "A born optimist, Old Jack." The Scottish brogue was still unmistakable.

"You're from over there, too, aren't you?" I said. "How do you find it out here?"

"Not bad," was his laconic reply. He bent back under the car. "Hand me that spanner there!" was his only other remark.

I left them steaming in the hot sun, and as the smell of spilled oil and grease seemed to pervade everything, moved away from the roadside and went to the rear of the building. There was no fence or railing to keep the desert out; one could step off the hot tarmac and begin walking, and soon be lost in the continual shimmer of mirage and heat. I had not gone more than a few hundred yards, picking my way carefully through the brush, when turning in a panic I found I could not distinguish the road or buildings, so well had they blended into the background. There was no sound. The sky was pale blue, and the sun glistened on the red soil as if picking out the gold tints from a rich ore. When the wind blew I felt the thin layer of top-soil shift under my feet. Finding a clearing, I sat down to smoke and contemplate the sky. This was the first time, I thought, that I had come across anything resembling harmony this side of the Rockies; this was the first time that I too could feel at ease. Everything had seemed too big, too untrammelled for a European to understand. And yet here was a small European community that seemed to exist quite naturally in these unnatural surroundings. I wondered how long it had taken that odd combination down there to come to terms with each other and with the country.

I must have mused away a good hour when a rustle in the bushes made me leap to my feet. I could feel the sweat start out from me, for I was deathly afraid of snakes. At first I saw nothing. Then, a bush waving in a curious fashion attracted my attention. My first impulse was to run, but when my eyes cleared of fright I recognised the faded blue of the girl's dress. She had flung herself on the ground and I could hear her laughing. Her brother was standing over her,

his face set in a hard line. As I watched, he raised his hand to hit her. Then, some sense must have warned him that someone was watching, for he turned in my direction. The girl laughed again, and rolled to one side. In a flash she had leapt to her feet and was running towards the building. Her skirt was crumpled around her legs, and she made me think of a wild animal glorying in its freedom.

The boy came towards me, treading warily.

"Got a light?" he asked. I offered him a box of matches and one of my cigarettes. He took these things gingerly, staring at the foreign labels. Suddenly he turned on me, his eyes flashing, the words tumbling out in his anger.

"You, what are you up to? I've had enough of talk, turning her head into a dream of movies, movies, movies, until you can't get anything else out of her. She was happy enough until you airmen came hanging round. And you can't even leave us alone now. Oh, no, you've got to come back, haven't you?" He came closer; his eyes fascinated me; they glittered like agate.

"What was you saying to her in there?" he said, and I saw a Celtic fury burst out of him. "What was you planning with her? Don't say you wasn't. You came out here to meet up with her, didn't you? Your car's been waiting out there for you this past half-hour. So what else you been waiting for?" His questions fell over themselves. I could not at first grasp what he was saying. My astonishment must have been obvious, for he stood back to get a good look at me, his hands hooked in his belt. He must have found my slight angular form rather amusing; its inadequacies were so evident, even to myself. Yet, even as I saw his hostility change to suspicious wonderment, and then to something else that I did not at first fathom, I felt a sense of frustration that his accusations were untrue, and a wish that the conversation I had had with her had meant something, and that I had in fact planned to meet her. And as I thought that, and remembered her, wondered suddenly if perhaps that was what she had wanted, and I had been too stupid to recognise it.

"Then you ain't one of those air-guys?" he said.

"No," I hastened to tell him. The laugh I gave was as forced as one of those laughs you make at your superior's jokes. "I've never been here before. I'm just driving through. On my way

*The Limited Share*

to the west coast, you know. I'm British, from the same part of the world as your father."

"Sure, sure," he said moodily. "We know all about that. We ain't so dumb as all that." He looked at me again. "I reckoned you were from that airbase," he conceded. "They were always hanging around here after her. I thought I'd seen you here before, that's all. But you ain't ever seen her before."

His brotherly concern touched me. It seemed such a relic of old times, such a lingering of European tradition, the peasant defending his family honour against the outsider. My relief at fitting this episode, too, into the familiar clichés made me relaxed and debonair. I felt in control again. There was even a touch of the heartiness with which one explains oneself to a social inferior in my voice. "I was just driving through," I repeated. "On my own. Going out west before I go back to England. Plan to sell the car there and fly back to New York. I'll probably never pass this way again. You're safe with me, although she's unforgettable, your sister."

His face darkened as I said that. "You quit that," he said; "you quit that kind of talk."

"All right," I said, "O.K.," trying now to make my voice less British so he wouldn't take fright again. "But look here, can't her father control her?"

"Her father!" He spat over his shoulder and I could feel his contempt for me grow. "I got it all planned, see. When she leaves, it'll be me that takes her. She don't want any help from anyone else. The old man won't budge an inch from this place. Know why? Because he's scared to. He thinks he's someone here, white chief with the Indians. But I don't go for that, and nor does she. And she knows that if she goes with anyone, I'm the one. No one else has the right to her like I do."

"Right to," I said stupidly.

He laughed, and it was his father's laugh, surprisingly. "You're an off-beat," he said not unkindly but matter-of-factly (and what else, purposefully?). "What do you think we've been talking about?"

I started to say something.

"Don't give me no more crap," he said. "My sister! You blind or something? She's no more my sister than he's her father."

If you want it exact," he mimicked my accent, "she's a sort of step-mother. That is, when those two bastards have finished sharing her."

I remembered his father's great laugh as he had said "Share and share alike."

"You mean, they both . . ." I blurted out.

"O.K., O.K.," he said. "Don't go getting ideas, don't think now you've caught on like those others. It's a limited share, mister, and as soon as we gets away, it won't be a share no more. I ain't going to spend my life waiting round on my father, no sir. Ain't she lit up? You don't think those two old birds got it in them, do you? That's my share, and I'm keeping it."

He had come close to me again, and I could see the look in his eye as he approached. It was cold, calculating and compelling.

"She's getting out of here, while there's still time, see? And you said you ain't in no hurry, didn't you? And you got a ticket back, ain't you? And you won't be this way again, will you?" His words, and the look in his eyes, seemed to merge into one dark glitter as I saw rather than felt his hands reach towards my throat, and the sound of what he had been saying grew and filled me until I became a part of it. . . .

I thought that I was in the hot-house at a zoo, and was standing in front of one of the plated-glass cages, behind which the dull piles of the snake weaved and fell with a rhythm which transfixed me; I was caught by the gleam of that small eye, bemused by it so that I could not move, not even when the rank smell of snake flesh engulfed me, even when the glass front of the cage shattered into glittering fragments beneath the sudden strike. . . .

The sun was gone, and the first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was the pale sky overhead where the clouds were just changing to dusk. The father was standing over me, with a pail in his hand, and the water was trickling down my face in cold rivulets. I turned my head painfully, conscious, as I did so, of the dull ache in my throat and the difficulty of swallowing.

"My God, my God," Mac was saying from the other side. Between them, they pulled me to my feet; the ground swayed under me; I could feel my legs sinking into the sand as it seemed to give way, transferring my weakness to the ground as it were.

*The Limited Share*

"What did you want to come off out here on your own?" Old Jack's face was pale and the sweat was running off him. "We were sitting in there, Mac and me, wondering where you was, when we heard them start the car. I didn't count on you being the kind to go off without paying, and when we runned out, there they was, tearing off down the road. That no-good son of mine!" He swore under his breath, bitter, accusing words.

"And she with him," said Mac. He rounded on me. "Why did you want to come out here on your own and give him the chance to do it? Why couldn't you mind your own business?"

He sounded like a good Presbyterian in a fit of righteousness.

"Leave off that," said the other man. "No use crying over spilt milk."

They led me back to the building, and I let them support me, not caring about anything, yet still strangely alive to moods, tensions, as if I were a detached watcher of a play. Old Jack's grip on me was like steel. I was surprised; I did not think that he would still be so strong.

Inside the little shack they propped me up at the counter and brought me some coffee. The effort to drink brought tears to my eyes; I could feel the blood pounding behind my ears. It seemed strange to be back in that small room, under the naked oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling. The harsh lines, the crudity of the place pained me, like seeing the sudden distortion of a familiar object.

"What are you going to do?" Old Jack said at last. "That damned son of mine! I knew he was planning something, but not this bad. What are you going to do about it?"

I realised then that he loved his son.

"Do!" said Mac, his hard face contorted. "You got to get her back."

"You keep out of this," Old Jack said. "This boy's got the right to decide. My son near strangled him; it's his car that's gone. He's the one who must say what's to be done."

"I don't want to cause any trouble to anyone," I said. My voice seemed far away. It didn't really matter what I said. "Let them go. You said the car would probably break down anyway."

Old Jack's sides heaved with laughter, but he was laughing out of relief.



Mac turned on him with suppressed fury. "I told you," he almost screamed, "I warned you about those airmen; I told you something like this would happen if she went with them."

He stopped abruptly as the other man laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's no good crying over spilt milk," Old Jack repeated. "She weren't ever with those airmen, you know that."

He let Mac go, and the Scot collapsed into a chair, his eyes half closed, his mouth drooling. I felt sorry for him; his self-control seemed completely gone; he did not even appear to mind that I should witness his hysteria.

"But you can't let her get away."

"Look, Mac." Old Jack was speaking slowly, as one would to a child. "She was just a no-good girl, a half-breed Indian from the desert. There'll be plenty more."

"Don't you say that," Mac said. "Don't you say that. She was mine, mine . . ."

"She wasn't anyone's. There'll be others, and they won't be yours any more than they'll be mine."

"But you got to get her back, go after her. . . ."

"And leave this?" Old Jack's words seemed to embrace not only the shack and the empty road outside but the desert and the brooding hills beyond and the calm resignation, which I in my foolishness had taken for Celtic tranquillity, and which I now saw for what it was, the acceptance by a man of an environment that he knew was bigger than he, or his, would ever be.

"You coward," Mac finally cried to him. "She weren't yours all right. Your own son made a fool of you." But his, too, was a cry of resignation, of defeat.

"Mac," said Old Jack, "I knew that long ago. . . ."

I left them when a 'bus came through later that night and we were able to flag it. We had found my suitcase beside the road, a hundred yards down, where they had thrown it. I seemed to see the look with which she must have tossed it from the rear window, the look with which he must have settled behind the steering-wheel. I still did not really care about things, where I went or how I got there. I felt as small as the ache in the back of my head; I felt as tired as the sand blown continually across the desert.

## *The Australian Sack-knot*

BY R. P. LISTER

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ONCE, in the eager dawn of my days, I learned from a man in a pub how to make an ingenious knot with two pieces of string. This man had been engaged for many years in the wool trade in Australia, and he told me a large number of fascinating things. He told me all about the rearing of sheep, about the lives of the men who tended them, about the ecology of the Outback, and about the Australian import and export trade. All this information might have helped to form me into a socially aware citizen with a well-stocked mind; but within a few hours I forgot it. All I remembered was how to make the Australian sack-knot.

It is a tricky thing, and when made it is like a circle of prettily intertwined string with four loose ends dangling from it. It is meant to be slipped over the neck of a sack of wool. You catch hold of the nearest loose end and pull it; and, whichever loose end you pull, the loop is drawn tight round the neck of the sack, or any other neck it happens to have been slipped over.

Armed with the knowledge of how to make the Australian sack-knot, I went out into the world, and in the course of many years became the idle, maladjusted and economically unstable member of society that I am now.

I cannot blame this gradual degeneration entirely on the Australian sack-knot. The truth is that all my life I have had a passion for acquiring useless information. Anything that has any potential value my mind rejects at once; anything useless it absorbs eagerly. Delving at random into the rag-bag of my memory, I come up with a maddening jumble of ill-assorted facts. Each is a thing of undoubted beauty in itself, but the whole does not form any significant pattern.

I know, for instance, that two-thirds of the way from the tail of the Bear to the tail of the Lion there is a constellation called Coma



Berenices that looks remarkably beautiful when viewed through field-glasses. It is nice to know this ; but I cannot navigate a ship. I know that the Christy's Autumnal Carpet is a kind of British moth, but I could not distinguish it from a Blomer's Rivulet, a Small Fan-Footed Wave or a Drab Looper, even if I wanted to. I can tell a DC-6 from a DC-7, but only by counting the windows, which is rarely practicable. I know that William III's horse tripped over a molehill, with the result that William III broke his collarbone, and later, rather surprisingly, died of it ; but I have only the haziest notion why Queen Anne succeeded him.

I know most of the first Canto of Dante's *Inferno* by heart, but I cannot carry on a conversation in Italian without circumlocution, delay and considerable misunderstanding. I know that the parry of tierce corresponds to the parry of sixte with the hand in pronation ; but to me, a poet living in London in the mid-twentieth century, the value of this knowledge must, I feel, be limited. I keep in my head an immense store of the names of places I have visited, which I remember with ease provided they are sufficiently outlandish, like Pajeb Lulejujaure, Bwlch Maes-y-Hirddyn, Skitnjanjurka or Amhainn Coire MhicNobuil. I remember, for example, that if you go east from Sgùrr na Moraich (a mountain in Wester Ross) you come to Sgùrr nan Saighead, Sgùrr Fhuaran, Sgùrr na Carnach, Sgùrr na Ciste Duibhe and Sgùrr nan Spainteach, in that order ; but I could not tell you the names of the streets leading from Blackfriars Bridge to the Old Bailey, though I have trodden them much more often and more recently.

I cannot say definitely that none of this information will ever be of any use to me, the world being what it is ; all I can say is that none of it has been of any use to me so far.

I have sometimes tried to comfort myself with the wisdom of the Chinese philosopher Chouang-Tzu. Chouang-Tzu held that there was no such thing as the useless. He drew his disciples' attention to the phenomenon—not uncommon in China at that time—of a man walking across a wide plain. All the ground he makes use of in doing so is the ground immediately below his feet. And yet, as Chouang-Tzu pointed out, if you cut away all the other ground to a great depth, leaving only that ground on which the man was going to place his

### *The Australian Sack-Knot*

feet, he could no longer walk across the plain, since the spikes of earth beneath him would collapse; or if they did not, he would lose his nerve and fall off.

It is an attractive thesis, though if I pursue it further I find that I am in a position exactly opposite to that of the walker across Chouang-Tzu's hypothetical plain. I am faced with the problem of walking across the plain, not on a series of spikes protruding from the abyss, but on a series of holes opening up to a great depth wherever I wish to place my feet.

Nevertheless, the picture has a certain validity, and Chouang-Tzu is, of course, right in maintaining that nothing can be dismissed as entirely useless. Even the Australian sack-knot might be useful to me one day. I imagine myself, cast up on the Sydney water-front, being questioned by the natives on my knowledge of local conditions. Their willingness to help me in my dire straits is gradually sapped as my utter lack of any useful knowledge manifests itself. Suddenly, as they are about to roll me back into the sea, I remember something from my store of useless information. I whip a couple of pieces of string from my pocket, or somebody else's pocket, and demonstrate my uncanny mastery of the Australian sack-knot. Whooping and cheering, they escort me to the city, buy me a beer and a big chop, and make me free of their homes, confident of my bright future as a woosack knot-tier.

Only one thing mars this optimistic dream. In the course of years, I have not only forgotten all about sheep-rearing, the social problems and ecology of the Outback and the minutiae of the Australian import and export trade. I have also, as a quiet afternoon alone with my thoughts and two pieces of string recently proved to me, forgotten how to make the Australian sack-knot.

## D. H. Lawrence and 'Miriam'

BY J. A. BRAMLEY

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AS most readers of *Sons and Lovers* know, the character of Miriam in that novel was based on Lawrence's early association with Jessie Chambers. She was the second daughter of the smallholder who occupied the Haggs' Farm, about four miles from Lawrence's home at Eastwood. They met when Jessie was fourteen and Lawrence a year older. Apart from her long association with Lawrence, Jessie was a remarkable girl in herself, with a mind and personality that well repays study. The consequences of the impact of these two on each other was profound and far-reaching, and has never had adequate justice done to it in the Lawrence story.

Lawrence has described vividly his first sight of the girl when he and his mother visited the Haggs in response to an invitation by Mrs. Chambers. 'In the doorway suddenly appeared a girl in a dirty apron. She was about fourteen years old, had a dark rosy face, a bunch of short, black curls, very fine and free, and dark eyes ; shy, questioning, a little resentful of strangers, she disappeared.' Poor Jessie had recently been taken away from school to become the family drudge, and was in a state of high rebellion against her lot. She has described how she craved for learning, for Beauty, and to be allowed to become a sharer in the feast of the human spirit. Thus she quickly attracted the attention of young Bert Lawrence, who at this time was attending Nottingham High School in Eton collar and little peaked cap, and who craved for the same kind of nourishment as Jessie. A friendship quickly sprang up between the two, which during the next five years ripened and deepened, and was of a most idyllic nature. They attended Church together on Sunday evenings : explored the beauties of the adjacent countryside, or made expeditions farther afield in parties, or were to be seen either in the Haggs' parlour or in the Lawrence sitting-room at Eastwood, their heads bowed

together over a book. When Jessie was seventeen her parents decided, partly at Lawrence's instigation, to send her back to school, so that she could train as a teacher. She went to the same teachers' training centre as Lawrence, where the pupils 'earned' their education by teaching for two and a half days in the week and being taught for the remainder. She has described these two years as the most completely happy in her life.

All this time a deep mental and spiritual awareness had been developing between them, which, on Jessie's side at least, was based on a clear recognition of his genius, the feeling that their many walks and talks together would one day be memorable, and that when she was with him she was in the presence of greatness. She has described how on one outing she saw him stooping in anguish over his umbrella which he appeared to be trying to mend. She went up to him and asked him what was wrong. He replied that it was his dead brother Ern's umbrella, and that his mother would be wild if it was broken. Jessie's heart was wrung by his distress and concern for his mother, and she saw him then as a symbolic figure, which set her eternally wondering and seeking. This farm girl was indeed the first person to recognise his genius. Moreover, for the next five years, while frequently suffering from heartache and anguish due to the fact that Lawrence had ruled out the possibility of love between them, and later because of his callous and brutal treatment of her, yet devoted herself steadily and unselfishly to the development of his artistic genius. She had a wonderful gift of sympathy, a deep intuitive understanding, and a passion for Beauty and things of the spirit, which enabled her to render him a service which he could have obtained from no one else at the time. Indeed, he himself acknowledged the debt later when he told her that she was the anvil on which he had hammered himself out.

In the meantime Lawrence became more and more of a favourite with the family at the Hags. His exuberance, his gaiety, his powers of mimicry, his resourcefulness at all indoor games, his readiness to help the overworked mother of this big family in the most menial household chores, made him a great favourite with all. Mrs. Chambers, who was always so concerned about his health, paid him the compliment of saying that she would like to be next to Bert in heaven.

And after he had spent a day in the fields helping with the harvest, Mr. Chambers exclaimed : " Work goes like fun when Bert's there : it's no trouble at all to keep them going." Unfortunately this affection for Lawrence met with no reciprocation when Jessie visited his home in Eastwood : his mother was plainly hostile to the girl, and her jealousy was one of the causes of the early shattering of their youthful idyll.

Mrs. Lawrence was the wife of an almost illiterate miner, and was of superior birth and education to her husband : indeed, for a time she had been a schoolteacher. There were five children, of whom Bert was the last but one. They lived in great poverty, and the parents were constantly at loggerheads, due principally to the mother's determination to segregate them from their father's influence and background : she was determined that none of her three sons should go down into the pits. Jessie has described Mrs. Lawrence as a bright vivacious little woman, full of vitality, amusingly racy and emphatic in her way of speaking, and completely conscious of her own rightness in everything. Although she was mainly interested in her sons, all her children adored her, and she ruled over them by a sort of divine right of motherhood : in such contrast to the ' poor disinherited father,' who seemed to have no part in the family life, and was driven night after night to find his consolation in the pubs. It may have been the conflict between the parents as well as the devotion between mother and son which caused the tension and under-current of hostility which Jessie always sensed in the Lawrences' home, and which often unnerved her and at times made her feel quite sick. It is also certain that after the second son Ern's sudden and tragic death in London, Mrs. Lawrence concentrated all her devotion on Bert, and became increasingly jealous of the attention he was paying Jessie and his frequent visits to the Haggs.

One Easter, when Jessie was nineteen and Lawrence a year older, a conversation took place between them which they have both described, and which introduced a note of discord into their hitherto harmonious relationship. Lawrence who, as Jessie was by now painfully aware, was completely subservient to his mother, told her that his people were worried over their relationship, and thought they should either get engaged or give it up. He then added these shattering

words: "I've looked into my heart and I cannot find that I love you as a husband should love his wife." But he offered to become engaged to her if she on her part felt she loved him sufficiently. Jessie has described the fierce blinding pain of mind and body that struck her on hearing these words. When she had recovered sufficiently to be able to speak she replied that she had not as yet thought consciously about love, but that she could not consent to get engaged under such humiliating circumstances: furthermore, the denial of love in advance took for her all meaning out of their friendship. She was for breaking it off completely and at once. But this Lawrence would not hear of: they had too much in common, and he knew that he could not surrender the joy of visiting the Haggis, nor the mental and spiritual nourishment he drew from the companionship of Jessie. So the friendship continued, but a note of discord had been introduced.

Jessie has emphasised that after this climacteric conversation things were never quite the same between them. She, like any other sensitive girl who has suffered a rebuff, had to be on her guard and felt compelled to repress her vital feelings for the brilliant and volatile young man whom at heart she loved so deeply. While Lawrence suffered from increasing frustration at the seeming coldness of the attractive young woman whom he loved so passionately on the mental and spiritual level, but whom he seemed to be unable even to kiss. It was a cruel dilemma for both of them; and there is not the slightest doubt that at this period the physical and spiritual side of Lawrence's nature became involved in a dichotomy which was to leave him scarred for the rest of his life. He began to over-emphasise the importance of sex, to make wild proposals to Jessie that she should remain his spiritual bride while he sought elsewhere for a woman he could embrace and make the mother of his children, and to show all the symptoms of a person who is suffering from a severe conflict. And later in life he spoke contemptuously of those who suffered from 'sex in the head.'

None the less it is a tribute to the depth of their friendship that it endured for a further five years after the Easter conversation, in spite of the continual jealousy and hostility of Mrs. Lawrence. In the meantime Lawrence had to leave Eastwood in order to take up



his first teaching post at Croydon. Jessie has described the affecting parting that took place between them at the farm gate a night or two before he left. She burst into tears and he took her in his arms and kissed and comforted her. Next day she called at his house to bid him a final farewell, but came away feeling deeply humiliated as she nearly always did when she went to his home.

For some time now he had been writing prose and poetry, and submitting his efforts to Jessie for her criticism and appreciation. She read the first draft of *Nethermere*, which ultimately became *The White Peacock*, which she thought, apart from the setting, was 'sentimental, story-bookish and unreal.' Later, when it was published, the author paid her the neat compliment of writing: 'I its creator—you its nurse.' And one lovely June day she copied out some of his poems and sent them to Hueffer, Editor of *The English Review*. They were accepted. Towards the end of his life Lawrence wrote her the following graceful tribute: 'The girl had launched me, so easily, on my literary career, like a princess cutting a thread, launching a ship.' When the first draft of *Sons and Lovers* was submitted to Jessie, she criticised it as extremely tired writing, said the autobiographical and fictional parts were ill-woven, and suggested that he re-wrote it, keeping closer to the reality and events of his life and home background. This he at once agreed to do, and asked Jessie to write out for him an account of their early outings and association when they had been so happy together. This she had started to do when he became ill with the pneumonia which terminated his teaching career.

Unfortunately, during the time he was at Croydon their relations in other respects was less happy. Twice Lawrence, driven by the spur of sex, became engaged to other women, breaking the news or introducing them to Jessie with the brutal frankness and callous cruelty of the complete egotist. Once he became secretly engaged to Jessie, in spite of his mother's ban, sending her a poem and writing a letter saying that he now realised he had loved her all along. But he broke this off a few months later, just before his mother's fatal illness. It was the death of his mother and the final writing of *Sons and Lovers* which put an end to their long and in many ways unique friendship—a friendship which had survived the repeated assaults



made on it by Lawrence's mother, who all the time had realised instinctively that Jessie had something to give her son which her essentially commonplace mind could never supply.

Jessie said that Lawrence was like a man distraught during his mother's long and painful illness, and that even the most disinterested love and affection could not reach or console him. He returned home from Croydon on alternate weekends to be with her, and was with her when she died. The day before the funeral the pair went for a walk together and discussed in anguish of spirit the old problem of their relationship. It was during this conversation that Lawrence told Jessie he had always loved his mother like a lover and that was why he could never love her. He then gave her the manuscript of three poems he had just written to his dead parent.

He began the final draft of *Sons and Lovers* at Eastwood soon after the termination of his teaching career. The first draft had been written at Croydon after his mother's death at the end of 1910. Jessie said that one of its themes was the mother's opposition to Paul's love for the character called Miriam. She added that one of her reasons for advising him to stick closer to the facts of his family life was the hope that in doing so he might resolve the clash between Mrs. Morel and Miriam on the spiritual plane where alone it could be worked out, with the result that he might break free from the mother obsession which still bound him, and walk out into psychological freedom. She realised of course that it would be necessary to deal with the subject impartially and with the greatest integrity: but she had great faith in Lawrence's fundamental integrity.

She has described her delight at the early part of the book, which dealt with the home life of the Morel family. But as the manuscripts containing the Miriam part of the story began to arrive, she became more and more perturbed. Those who have unconsciously sat for their portraits in the works of famous novelists have generally proved themselves to be extremely touchy as to the results. It is therefore not surprising that a girl who had been emotionally involved with the author of *Sons and Lovers* for ten years should have had her own very definitive views as to what he ought to think of her and the nature of their relationship. She complained that he had wilfully distorted the character of Miriam, heaping on her head every unattractive

quality, in order to justify Mrs. Morel's hatred of her. Writing to her friend, Helen Corke, who was a teacher at Lawrence's Croydon school, she says: 'The "Miriam" part of the novel is a slander—a fearful treachery . . . I think the story would be painful even to a stranger. At the end one feels no further—only shocked and dismayed at the tragedy and brutality of it all. Don't talk about it, please. If I am to live at all it will be necessary to put David out of my life—to ignore him entirely, in thought and speech.' Perhaps the worst part of the betrayal in her eyes was the brutalisation of the love theme in the book, where he seemed to be trampling on the deepest spiritual values of her life.

It was, indeed, bitter. Once again, in art as in life, she had to accept the rôle of humiliation and defeat, while the bays of victory for a second time crowned the mother's brow. Later, when in a sort of refinement of cruelty, Lawrence sends her the proofsheets of the novel to read, her distress becomes even more pronounced. 'I can't think why David wished me to read them, since nothing can now be altered. All this turmoil of emotion makes me fearfully sick—I can neither eat nor sleep, and sit in front of the fire shivering as if I had ague. Indeed after reading that accursed writing I am as flabby as even David could wish to portray me. If he doesn't soon let me alone he'll be the death of me.' And the whole tragedy was made more poignant by the consequent shattering of her belief in Lawrence's fundamental integrity, both as an artist and a man. She saw him now as an alien and a philistine, subservient still to his dead mother's will, who had betrayed all she stood for, and mocked at the very meaning of the word love. It was almost a mortal blow, and it is doubtful if Jessie ever completely recovered from its effects. She complained that she felt as if she had suffered some terrible inner injury and had the greatest difficulty in avoiding a collapse. Writing about it eighteen years later to her sister May in Canada she says: 'I must tell you in all seriousness and sincerity that, but for divine help, I could not have come through unmaimed. For I was really stricken unto death, and I had to fight for my life.'

Indeed, if some of her remarks written in anguish of spirit show that she was confusing art with life, and do scant justice to the remarkable qualities of the novel, they certainly point very plainly to

Lawrence's limitations as a novelist. Fairness, balance, artistic detachment, the ability to see all round his problem or anyone's point of view but his own, are not qualities that are to be found in his books. In urging him to re-write the book for the reasons she did she had plainly credited him with powers he did not possess. She handed him back the manuscript in silence on almost the last time they met, with her remarks written between the lines and on several attached loose sheets. Her feelings ran too deep for words—they both knew it was the end of their long and in many ways wonderful friendship. But the passing of Lawrence out of her life made her wish for some time quite definitely that she was dead. However, she recovered sufficiently to be able to marry a schoolmaster three years later. She died in 1944, fourteen years after her friend.

But the story is not quite finished. On the day of his death in 1930, although she had had no communication with him for eighteen years, and did not know he was ill, she plainly *saw* him, and the room in which she was working became filled with his presence, giving her a sense of unspeakable joy, and she heard him say: "Can you only remember the pain and none of the joy?" Next morning she read of his death in the papers, and it came as a great shock.

Writing again to her friend Helen Corke she passes her mature and considered judgement on her old sweetheart, both as a writer and a man. 'I see from the papers that D. H. L. has finished his earthly course. It was a great shock to me because I did not know he was ill . . . I feel for him as deeply as in the old days, and if you know anything of him you would care to pass on, I shall be glad to hear of it. My impression is that he suffered deeply and blindly at the hands of life . . . It is strange to think he no longer sees the sunshine and the great clouds upon the skies of March. Let us hope his angry spirit has found peace, which I think it did not find on earth.'

In a later letter, with a clear-sighted logic, she makes some critical comments in the light of the religious and spiritual values she had clung to all her life. 'As an artist, when he is dealing with the immediate and concrete, he is superb, but when he essays to be a thinker I find him superficial and unconvincing, and quite soon boring . . . His concern was to find some means of escape from that narrow prison of his own ego, and to do that he was prepared

to assault the cosmos. So, whenever I read his almost delirious denunciations of what he pretended to regard as Christianity, I can only see the caged panther lashing himself into a fury to find some way out of his strait prison. D. H. L. was a man in bondage, and all his theorising and philosophisings only bear witness to his agony.’

She believed that he was driven out into a wilderness of egotism principally by his denial of the validity of any spiritual values, and the fact that he regarded himself as being exempt from the laws which bind mankind together. Moreover, as he sought only for the animal in the human female, his inner consciousness became ‘a terrible battleground where his two selves were constantly fighting each other.’ But she believed that he broke out of his prison before the end and became a free spirit, though by then he had expended his vital force. ‘The suffering of self-division to its utmost limit was a lifetime’s work, maybe. The story of the unification lies in the future.’

But, like Lawrence, who two years earlier had written to her younger brother David that touching letter of love and affection for the family at the Hags—a letter that was not shown to Jessie until after his death—so her mood changes when she contemplates those golden days of her youth at the farm, in the company of the young genius for whom she had conceived such an abiding attachment. Perhaps it was the only time in their lives that these two passionate and sensitive spirits, so alike in many ways, were ever completely happy. ‘In our home his name was a synonym for joy—radiant joy in simply being alive. He communicated that joy to all of us, and made us even happy with one another: no small achievement in a family like ours!’ She remembers how with all wild things, a rabbit caught in a snare, flowers and birds, the speckled eggs in a nest, he was in primal sympathy—‘a living vibration passed between him and them so that I always saw him, in the strictest sense of the word, immortal.’ And she concludes: ‘Poor D. H. L.—and yet how wonderful he was! It is good to know that such a spirit can take human form: if it falls short of the glory of God, well, that is in God’s hands too. He has helped me to extend enormously the territory of life and that is a god-like thing to do.’ It was a just and generous tribute from the gifted woman who had gained so much and suffered so deeply at his hands.

## Wheels

BY ELSPETH DAVIE

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MANY a time the professor boasted of the work which he managed to get done in trains as he went from town to town, giving lectures to societies and papers to conferences. Even at his own post in the university he was continually on the move, for he lived a long way out of the city and thought nothing of making the daily journey, there and back, throughout the three terms. When his colleagues, sitting snugly wedged between desk and fireplace in booklined studies, described their methods and times of work, he took a greater pleasure in describing his own ; and in a community where new eccentricities were hard to come by, his was fairly simple to convey. He could frankly say that he had no regular place of work—or rather, no fixed place. A railway carriage, swaying and rattling through unfamiliar fields and villages was, as often as not, his only study for weeks on end.

On long journeys he would spread papers along the seat, stack his books on the rack, and when he had the carriage to himself, as he often had, he found that it helped him in working out some single difficult problem, to move constantly from one window to the other across a space which took him only two short steps to cross. Here he was safely confined as in a cell, and he found it stimulating to be able to look from the one world where he worked into another which whirled past so close that he could almost touch the yellow weed on the banks or the sides of tunnels as they rattled through. Yet nothing could reach him from this world, except the pollen or soot, blown in on windy days, or the occasional dandelion seeds which settled between the pages of his books and floated out, blown by his vehement breath, days later in the lecture room. No sound from outside could reach him either. Sometimes he passed long rows of men with sledge-hammers, striking on iron bars, close to the line ;

or children ran forward from nearby houses, shouting and trailing sticks and pieces of tin along the corrugated fences separating the gardens. But he could watch the swinging arms and the open mouths, framed by the window, as he might watch a piece of extravagant miming. Even thunderstorms could break over his head and be recognised only by an unnatural flicker of light in the glass of some advertisement opposite, if he happened to raise his head in time.

The professor's feeling for trains was no passing phase or obsession left over from childhood. It had grown stronger as he had grown stronger in his own powers, and nowadays it was not so much a love of trains as an absolute identification with them. Many of the phrases which he used to describe the thoughts and actions of human beings might have applied as well to the movement of wheels and screws; and he liked to feel that his own mind worked with the energy and control of a powerful engine—not simply mechanically propelled, but one fed and illumined by fire itself. At the long halts in certain stations he would sometimes get off and walk up to the top of the train to watch the fuel being shovelled in—dull, lifeless nuggets changing miraculously into fire and speed. As far as he was concerned, most of the men he knew dealt in nuggets which remained grey nuggets—capable, at best, of keeping some domestic fire going for a few hours at a time. But he knew that it was not so with him.

He was a man in his middle fifties—tall and very thin. His large head, except for the half cap of reddish hair, was round and bare—bare it seemed, rather than bald, for there was nothing vulnerable or ageing about this head. He considered his brain to be his chief weapon, and the bareness of his head was like the bareness of a powerful bludgeon with which he was able to defend himself at all times. Although he was not known to take any particular form of exercise, he moved with deliberate ease and an economy of energy which suggested that he had solved not only some of the harder problems of language, but also that he had himself under control and had solved the problem of well-regulated movement right down to the joints of his fingers. The only exaggerated movement he ever made was an occasional side-to-side swing of his head when he was particularly tired, as though, whatever else happened, he had to keep this head smoothly moving and be constantly on the look-out



## *Wheels*

for attack from any quarter. He had a long, curved problem-probing nose, a pugnacious chin outlined but not softened by a short beard, and he was fond of saying that it was his long experience in argument which had kept him as young and active as any other fighter. He had never settled down into a rut like so many people of his age, and he believed that he owed much of his liveliness to the train journeys which he made all the year round.

Certain clichés of praise, which sometimes appeared in reviews of his work or were spoken from the platform in votes of thanks, though they occasionally irritated him, seemed to him to sum up, however inadequately—something of what he felt about himself as he travelled from one railway station to another about the countryside. When he felt the heavy vibration under his pen as he covered sheet after sheet with writing, made even stronger and more energetic by the movement, he felt that such phrases: '... the professor goes straight for his objective ... ruthless and unswerving ... without wasting any time on the way ...' or 'new horizons open out on every side as he drives us before him with his accustomed energy ...' these, he felt, held a hint of truth in them. It was not that he did not notice the life around him. In trains and out of them, people were sometimes surprised at how much he could relate of his journeys afterwards. He had an extraordinary facility for reading the names of unfamiliar stations from express trains, and he could decipher posters and even newsbills while flying through at fifty miles an hour. But the real fascination for him lay in the fact that he could leave them all—places, people, and all the far-strewn junk of their habitations—far behind forever in only a few seconds. The professor was not given to dramatising himself, but when the subject of death came up, he had been heard to remark jokingly—but at the same time making wide, unexpected gestures of acceptance with his long arms—that he could not imagine himself sinking passively into oblivion in his bed or in an armchair. The most likely end for a man like himself would be a train-smash—his spirit whirling off like a still-glowing spark from a machine which, only a few minutes before, had been going full steam ahead into the darkness. At times like these he made it seem almost a matter of surprise and regret that he had not been born in a railway station.



The professor was not happy in the long, summer vacation unless he was speeding from one place to another on a definite piece of work. It was not enough for him to take a pile of books and papers to the seaside, or to try and enjoy himself wandering about the continent, as many of his colleagues did. In fact, he disliked the whole idea of holidays, especially as so many uninformed people imagined that his having a chair meant that he could sit in it comfortably if he liked for at least five months of every year; and he spent a good deal of time and nervous energy analysing, modifying and correcting this view, wherever it showed itself. But as he was nearly always travelling to take on some course at a Summer School or conference in the longest vacation he found his free time easier to describe than many other men in his position.

"What do I do with my free time?" He would take up the question with a smile which felt good-natured to the muscles of his own face, but which made a disturbing impression on the person opposite.

"Well, there it is, if you want to call it *free* time," he would go on, recklessly shuffling the pile of papers on his knee and producing from amongst them a programme of close-set dates, divided sometimes into hours and even minutes, and stretching on through all the summer months. After such an encounter many an innocent holiday-maker stepped off the train thinking himself lucky indeed to be getting his holiday at the seaside; but hardened travellers like the professor himself countered his move by producing mysterious lists of their own, engagement diaries black with names, and even maps on which they traced their devious routes round the country. Unless he was careful to whom he spoke, the professor often found himself engaged in this battle of wits over the question of who took the shortest holiday in the year. Yet as often as not he scored his point simply by the abstracted gaze with which he listened to other people's information and the impression which he gave, at the same time, of struggling to concentrate on far more difficult questions of infinitely greater importance.

One summer the professor was invited to give a course of lectures to a new group which, two years before, had taken over a small and unknown castle as their headquarters. It was not quite the usual

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Summer School, but run on the lines of an informal conference by a group of high-principled students and teachers, and for the benefit of undergraduates over a wide area of the country. Nor were the undergraduates quite the usual type to be found at summer gatherings. All of them had only lately recovered from some serious illness, physical or mental, and were preparing to take up their studies the following winter. The Castle Group, as it was called, had been formed to help them over this period of adjustment to their work and to give them, over a few weeks, a mixture, both soothing and stimulating, of convalescent home and holiday camp, plus a mild injection of learning given by the experts between ten and twelve-thirty in the morning. For healthy guests and convalescents who were strong enough to hear the opinions of their fellows, there were special discussion groups in the late evening, centred intimately about one guest speaker who was free to bring up any subject he wished and invite questions on it. Religion did not appear on the programme in black and white, but it pervaded the atmosphere like a bracing air in which it would seem a great ingratitude not to thrive and grow healthier in body and spirit day by day. More than this, the Castle Group made a special point of being wide open to all races and creeds and all forms of worship, and though up till now it had been attended only by young British students of the most orthodox belief and behaviour, only a minimum of religious terms was used except amongst the leaders when they met together to discuss further means of widening the way in. At all other times, God was awaited cheerfully and good-humouredly as might be the visits of a distinguished doctor or psychiatrist, and clergymen guests were conspicuous by the absence of black in their get-up and the broadness of their general outlook. The invitation, then, which had gone out to the professor was, in fact, rather a symbol of their extraordinary tolerance than a recognition of his own special gifts.

The atmosphere of toleration was formidable. Though still a long way from his destination, the professor felt it from the moment that he stepped from the train and faced the three young men who had come to drive him the fifteen miles to the castle by car. He could see at a glance that these were not going to be the sharp-witted characters whom he welcomed above all others at such a gathering--

people who could be counted on to send the blood to his head, and force him from the start to bring out the sharpest and subtlest arguments he had in store. Instead he saw, with a certain lowering of the spirits, that they were determined to take him to their hearts on the spot, and though their greeting was lost in the shriek of the train's whistle, their smiles and the long, welcoming arms held out to him, made up for any loss of words. Before the smoke had dissolved above the platform, he was hurried out of the station—and turned round only once for a last look at the train as it curved the bend. With it, as far as he was concerned, went the source of his power, and also the means of his escape. But by this time he was well used to the routine. For the next few days he would demonstrate his mind at work in a way which suggested that, though most other brains were composed of spongy tissue, wheels of steel and vibrating wires had replaced this in his own; he would make a swift and powerful impression, and after the week a train would again rescue him from their midst and renew him for the next encounter. Nevertheless, today as he was driven further and further into the country along a rough, winding road, he had a sense of foreboding. Although the gesture seemed discourteous to the young men, who had already begun to point out places of interest in the surrounding country, he felt impelled to pull out his timetable, every now and then, to make sure of the exact time of his returning train. This was a gesture which was also unnecessary, as for a long time back he had known the whole book off by heart.

As a rule, the professor enjoyed arriving at out-of-the-way places, but the first sight of this place was not reassuring. A broad forbearance seemed to have spread from the house itself to its surroundings, flattening and removing all obstacles, so that the approach was as open and lacking in mystery as the drive up to a modern bungalow. Students, digging for the health of body and spirit, had levelled small hills and cut down great trees. Where it had been impossible to lift up boulders, embedded in the roots of old trees, rock gardens had been planted and half a dozen home-made garden seats, rigidly constructed for meditation rather than romance, had been wedged into unscreened corners. For some distance behind the building, the rough ground was marked with rows of tattered vegetables, and in a square patch of earth, newly cut from the moorland and destined one day to be an

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orchard, a few frail, seedling trees had survived their first winter's wind. Inside the castle there had been less to do, and visitors, for the first few minutes on arrival, even felt that they had been cheated by the name of the place. At first glance, it looked not more than a hundred years old, and obviously owed its name simply to the castellated outline of its roof and the turrets at either end, smooth as ornamental biscuit tins. But old or new, no atmosphere could, in any case, have survived in the bracing air created by relays of enthusiastic men and women who had come together over the last two years to demonstrate that, with co-operation and toleration, a home could be made out of a Victorian Castle and a garden out of a wilderness. There were limits to what could be done, however, and the roads which led eastwards down towards the coast and up into the hills on the other side, were as rough as any in that part of the country. It seemed to the professor, as he looked about the place, that there were no cars on the road except the ramshackle one in which he had been driven. Instead, he observed with a sinking heart that most able-bodied people, amongst both staff and students, were going about on bicycles.

The professor had paid very little attention to bicycles since he was a small boy. For him, they lacked all power and fire and, in fact, were scarcely to be thought of as machines at all. But now, a handsome bike being lent to him immediately on arrival, he had to think about them and examine them and talk about them for a good part of each day. He discovered that it was not enough to lecture in the mornings and galvanise the fireside discussions in the evenings after supper. The younger men were also expected to accompany one or other of the picnic-study groups which went off on bicycles every afternoon into the surrounding countryside. The professor had certainly never doubted that he belonged, in spirit at any rate, to the younger group; the weather was fine, the young men and women eager and stronger than he had ever expected convalescents to be, and they had a healthy outlook on learning which led them to choose high sites with panoramic views for their study places. More than once during the first days of his visit, it occurred to the professor that it was not so difficult to account for the unclaimed bike which he rode. Some genuine, unsuspecting convalescent—one true to the name—had probably succumbed under the strain of his first days at the Castle,

dying without fuss and leaving his brand-new bike as a gift to the community. From the size and weight of the thing, he thought it more than likely that it would outlive its owner by many years.

Very often the professor was not able to speak at all when he arrived on the heights. His silences, though still impressive, became longer after each ride. Even when he had recovered his breath, it was a new experience for him to have to throw out his words, not into the respectful hollow of a large classroom, but up into the open air, humming and whistling with a life of its own. The angry arguments with himself which were characteristic of his teaching and which would come bursting back from four, bare walls with a startling effect upon those who sat around, were now liable to be dispersed by chance currents of air; and the few, well-chosen words of criticism with which indoors, he could quietly splinter someone's too-lengthy conclusion, so that this particular voice might not be heard again for several hours or even days—these, out-of-doors, were as often as not interrupted by the honking of some unidentified bird in a nearby pond. He would then be lucky if there were not two or three bird-watchers amongst the group who would immediately get to their feet to investigate; for half the fun of these study-picnics—as it had been so often pointed out to newcomers at the Castle—was their extraordinary friendliness and informality. But it was, above all, the bicycle, which prevented him from establishing the proper relationship. After a few days the idea of himself as a highly-organised and streamlined machine for the destruction of nonsense, had given place before an entirely new image which, little by little, was beginning to take its place.

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It was difficult to avoid seeing it. Wherever he looked, in front or behind, he saw arched, bony spines and eager necks craning forward over handlebars, and legs which pedalled furiously or laboriously on, mile after mile, without a stop. But when he looked at himself he was aware simply of a pair of extraordinarily shaped knees which moved up and down under his eyes—not with the regularity of well-oiled pistons, but with the cracking, straining, knobbled movement of badly-fitting joints of wood. He was fascinated by these knees since he had now time to study them in the greatest detail, even down to the

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slow shredding of threads at the trouser-knees as the cloth stretched to ripping point and abruptly slackened. He watched these knees bulging grotesquely to take a steep road, and unknotting and softening on a straight one; or he saw them simply fixed and bent motionless on a downward slope, the trouser-knees ballooning out into a fat shape in the breeze. He seldom took his eyes off them to look around and never spoke until he had reached his destination, when he would put his feet to the ground with unnatural caution like a man treading suspected bogland, for even off the bike he discovered that he must still concentrate on his knees in case, after a few minutes' walking, they should threaten to let him down. Indeed, this weakness did not disappear with practice; on the third cycling expedition it was, if anything, worse than on the first.

In spite of the successful morning and evening sessions, the professor found that the afternoons occupied much of his concentration and energy. The tremendous driving power which sustained him until lunchtime and which, hitherto, had broken down defences and opened up endless vistas of self-doubt for his students, began to be seriously sapped by the cycle runs and picnic teas. It now took him all his time to work up sufficient speed and power for the evening attack. A half-hearted discussion on 'Conscience versus Chaos' or 'Psycho-analysis in the Moral Framework' could go on for some time around him before he could bring himself to destroy it, and his silence, which could have been interpreted before as a gathering together of his forces, was simply caused by a limpness in all his limbs and a lightness in the head due to the morning's efforts.

But he was counting the days, and towards the end of the week he was able to wheel out his bicycle as confidently as the rest of them. Only another couple of days, and they would be accompanying him back to the station as they accompanied all their guests at the Castle. He saw it all with an exhilarating clearness; how he would stare down as they pedalled like mad along the road beside the railway line, vainly trying to keep up with the train as it gathered speed, until at last they would fall far behind, a collection of shiny, round-backed insects creeping after him in the distance. He would never need to set his hands on a bicycle again as long as he lived.

The evening before he was due to leave the Warden of the Castle



Group waylaid the professor as he was coming out of his last after-supper discussion group. On the whole, it had been a successful evening. He had gathered together all his powers for a last effort, so that there should be no question of remembering him by a bent back and jerking knees, but by a quick-firing of questions and answers and a final series of hammer-blows, aimed at putting a bent argument back into shape. An excess of emotion had crept into an argument on good and evil. He had to raise his voice above it all and call out to them in tones anguished but clear :

"I don't think I quite understand what is being said here—perhaps I am being particularly stupid this evening ; but if you could repeat your argument again very, very slowly this time, ladies and gentlemen, and define the terms you are using, simply for my benefit, then we might be able to communicate with one another again !"

But in five minutes the session was over, and the professor left in triumph, without getting back into communication with anyone. He scarcely felt the plucking of his sleeve as he went down the corridor to his room, but he knew at once, by the expression on the man's face when he got inside the door, that the Warden was going to appeal to the best in him. He was accustomed to that look, and in the past he had known how to counter it. But this time his heart misgave him. The other man had already gone a long way with his proposition before he could brace himself to interrupt him.

" . . . I don't know how we can ask you to do this . . . but if you could give us one more week of your time," the man was saying. "There was already a big gap in the programme owing to Professor Haddow's sudden illness ; and now this morning we hear that Dr. Pollock has been held up indefinitely at a conference on the Continent ; indeed he doubts whether he will be with us until another ten days at least . . . Both men of outstanding gifts as you yourself know. But, in the present circumstances, if I may say so, you happen to be the only man who, in my opinion, could quite easily stand in place of both of them put together." The Warden lowered his voice discreetly at this point and glanced round as if the two men might have unexpectedly returned together and be standing right behind him to do him some injury. Then he turned towards the professor again, opening the palms of his hands in appeal. He waited silently.



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At any other time the professor could have summoned up a dozen suitable excuses for getting away, but the moment for a swift and final refusal went by. As the other man murmured further compliments and pleas for help, he experienced a new sensation in his chest which he diagnosed as a morbid softening in the region of his heart, and a renewed limpness through his limbs, not unlike that which he experienced after a day's cycling. For a moment, as he let himself in for another week at the Castle, he felt scarcely able to stand on his two legs. As soon as he was alone he sank, exhausted, into an arm-chair; but the warden shut the door behind him with the jauntiness of a man who, time after time, has proved himself able to bring the best out of the most difficult people. It was all part of the day's work at the Castle.

The following afternoon, from the slopes of a hill overlooking the country for miles around, the professor caught a glimpse of the train which should have taken him away from the place forever. He heard it rattling down through the valley below and saw all its windows reflecting the light of the evening sun in a series of challenging flashes which seemed meant for his eyes alone. But he could no longer identify himself with it. For the first time in years he had failed to be at the station for the time he had planned—and he had not merely missed it by minutes. Seven more long and exhausting days would go by before he caught the next train. Nevertheless, as his eyes followed its windings, he vowed that it should not be a day longer than that, and in the meantime he was not going to be made a fool of on two wheels. Under his hands the bicycle could be revolutionised, and in a very short time, if he put everything he had into the job, he could turn it into a real machine, worthy of the name. If it could never have the force of steam or electricity behind it, it might still be made to express something of his own personality which, hitherto, had supplied abundant sparks and engine power to a variety of situations far more difficult than the present one. From that moment the professor began to discipline himself for the task before him.

It was easy enough, he discovered, when whizzing downhill in front of the rest of them, to straighten his back, stiffen his knees, and generally smooth himself into what he considered to be a streamlined shape. He even discovered that he could throw out a few words to

those coming on behind, and he saw the time when it might be possible to carry on a vivid discussion with anyone who could keep up with him. The countryside did not interest him much, but he was even able to look about him several times with the keen glance of the genuine nature-lover. It was only on the following day that he began to see that he had set himself a major task. The cycling group, working on the general rule that it was better to aim at several goals in an afternoon rather than one, had planned an expedition which combined the usual picnic-study party with a visit to an ancient stone circle standing five or six miles east of the Castle, on the highest point of the moor.

It was not a difficult climb, but it was a steady one. The professor laid hold of his machine like a racing-cyclist, and set himself to concentrate on the road before him as he had never done before. But at best he could manage little more than a walking speed, and he scarcely felt the movement of the wheels beneath him. What he had, however, was a close-up view of every detail of the ground for miles on end, and as he stared down, his eyes bulging a little with the effort, his mouth half-open, he looked like a naturalist continually amazed at the pebbles and earth, feathers, twigs and insects slowly passing beneath his eyes. But the professor was not at all amazed; he disliked this slow-motion close-up of the ground, and to him one pebble was so much like another that it was as though he had been staring at the same patch of road all afternoon. He was grateful, however, for even the smallest changes in the colour of the earth or of the extra interest involved in manœuvring a particularly stony part of the road. But there was little choice for him, and in the end he was simply glad that, by staring beyond the front wheel, he could keep his eyes off his knees which appeared more grotesque the longer he looked at them. They at any rate, were a continual source of amazement. Yet, in spite of it all, he managed to look an impressive figure as he bent over the handlebars, and somehow he had gradually begun to infuse his bike with something of his own importance. It no longer looked the wobbling, uncontrolled vehicle it had been when he first laid hands on it. It was now a machine, steely and efficient, and behind him in the road it made a rut which was as deep and straight as that made by a motor-bike.

Nevertheless, while the convalescents grew stronger every day,

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the professor grew more exhausted. Sometimes a series of minute, red wheels would spin before his eyes when he bent down to put on his shoes in the morning, and his dreams were disturbed by the never-ending whirring of bicycle tyres floating miraculously over the deep sand of deserts or skimming the grass of lush meadows ; and time and again, in the midst of these dreams, he would sleep through his alarm which had begun to sound in his dreaming ears more and more like the urgent, continuous ringing of hundreds of bicycle bells. Younger men on the staff, who had long ago given up all forms of exercise, began to come up to him and congratulate him—not on his agility in discussion, his unfailing grip of fundamentals, but on his endurance on the machine, his enviable speed and balance. They did not know that he was again counting the days and hours till his departure, living, above all, for that moment when he would free-wheel round the corner of the Castle for the last time and send the bicycle flying with one push to the furthest corner of the shed, careless of the crashing of the other bikes, careless of punctures and scraped mudguards. It was a moment he had waited for too long.

Meantime, he did his best to keep up his own work, and whenever he had a couple of hours to himself he took up the learned article which he was writing for a scholar's journal. It was usual for him to write quickly with great force and verve. These last days, however, the usual energy had been missing. Laboriously he wound out the words—words without spark or speed. Ideas, which a few weeks ago would have fired him, now lay smoothly with a deadly flatness on the page. The whole thing was in slow-motion—he knew that was what it was—and his mind was working with the smooth, mechanical action of a pair of bicycle wheels softly whirring along a dead level road.

Yet it was not lack of time which had brought him to this. While he was on the job it seemed to him that he had almost too much time to study the details of what he had written. He found himself examining every single point from every possible angle, and he took great pains to emphasise, over and over again, the more obvious facts which were before everyone's eyes. The words themselves became an obsession with him and he spent a longer and longer time each day staring at them and shifting them here and there, like so many identical pebbles which must somehow be moved out of his way. And once

or twice, during the last couple of nights, he had woken up to hear in his ears the one word which he could not hear without a shudder of nervous laughter when it was applied to other men's work—the word 'pedestrian.' It was inconceivable that it should ever be used about him, and, strictly speaking, it would sound inexact to him, even if it was. For it was certainly not walking which had brought him to this pass. But the meaning would be clear enough to most people. This it was which he feared for himself and which now began to haunt him, waking and sleeping; but especially in those moments after lunch when he was painfully pumping the life from his own heart and lungs into the deflated back wheel of his bicycle.

There was now no need for the professor to struggle any longer to show himself master of anything. All his movements had, by this time, become purely mechanical, leaving him free to concentrate all his attention on one thing, and one thing only. He began to resemble one of those pale-faced racing-cyclists with deeply-furrowed brows and bitten lips who look neither to right or to left, but grimly in front of them at some distant goal. He lived simply from day to day, from hour to hour, and in his case the goal before him, now at last almost in sight, was the welcoming plume of smoke which he would see as he neared the station—smoke rising from a train already oiled, stoked and breathing out fire for his deliverance.

The good weather held to the last day of his visit, and the professor was able to refer to this at the farewell luncheon party which was given in his honour on the day he was due to leave.

"It has enabled me to do more—much more than I had ever thought was possible in the time," he said, leaning heavily on the table and looking across with jaundiced eyes at the row of enthusiastic faces which stared up at him. "It has enabled me to see many places of interest which I should otherwise never have known—to see castles and old forts, ancient towers and prehistoric monuments. I have seen the countryside," he added as a bitter afterthought, and for a second he allowed himself to glance behind out of the window where, for the first time in two weeks, the heavy clouds were blowing up for rain.

"I might otherwise have seen almost nothing of it," he went on after a long pause, while he waited for the first drops of rain to streak the glass. Even now he automatically looked about him for the

convalescents, for even one to whom he could particularly address himself; but these faces seemed rounder and rosier, their eyes brighter than ever. He searched conscientiously, however, until he found a young man sitting at the opposite end of the table who, even from a distance, seemed to show distinct signs of ill-health. There was something rigid and ill-at-ease about the fellow, and he held his head stiffly bent under the professor's gaze, occasionally stroking his brow with nervous fingers.

"But best of all," the professor went on, still staring at the withdrawn face at the end of the table, "it has enabled me to get to know some of you young people—particularly those less fortunate in health—and to share in this experience, to become, perhaps, for a short time one of yourselves—if you will allow me to put it like that . . ."

At this point the young man, who had been shifting uneasily under the morbidly sympathetic gaze of the professor, looked up with an expression of undisguised annoyance and dislike; and the professor hastily removed his eyes. This was no undergraduate, he now saw. He recognised at once the newly-appointed lecturer at his own college—a man nearly his own age who now showed, as he raised his head, a heavy jowl whose hard-living crimson was slowly beginning to suffuse his whole face. The professor ventured no further remarks. After the lunch was over he spent a quiet hour getting his things together and verifying the time of his train and various other trains all over the British Isles. Juggling the close rows of figures in a timetable and working out a series of complicated and unlikely connections was, to him, as satisfying as an awkward problem in Mathematics, and that afternoon he found the nervous tension under which he had been living considerably eased as he ran his finger down the rough pages.

He was summoned rather earlier than he had expected by one of the young men who had driven him from the station a fortnight ago, and was now to take him back again. Already, on the main drive outside, a crowd had gathered to see him off, and, in a way, he was not at all surprised to see so many waiting there. He had worked hard and he had worked overtime. He had obviously made his mark on them and he certainly did not intend them to see that they had made their mark—perhaps an ineffaceable one—on him. He did not smile as he made his way through the midst of them, for it was not his habit to be

responsive to a great number of smiling faces together. But he bowed and nodded and waited gravely for a clear way to be made for him to walk through to the waiting car. Although he was used to all kinds of student antics he was not quite ready for the way in which, at a command, they fell out into two long lines, making a sort of bridal passage for him to walk up, and he was taken aback to see that three young men, smiling more broadly than the rest, awaited him at the top of the line. But it was the man in the middle who displeased him most. He was holding onto a bicycle familiar to the professor in every dent and scar. But as he drew nearer he saw that, overnight, it had been transformed. Not a speck of mud or rust could be seen on it now; here and there the enamel had been touched up with paint, the leather of the saddle shone, and the wheels had been scraped and polished until they glittered like new. On the handlebars were tied two colourful labels which the professor could not at once bring himself to read. But there was no need to read them. A silence fell on them all as the young man started his speech. It was a better speech than the professor had given that morning. It was more simple and spontaneous, and the boy's voice rang with deep, genuine feeling.

"It has come as a surprise to us all," he said, still gripping the handlebars with white-knuckled enthusiasm, "to find that the professor, who has shown himself such a keen cyclist, has actually got no bicycle of his own. That's rather an odd thing, isn't it? You might almost call it an eccentricity—for a man to forgo something which brings him such obvious pleasure. Some day, perhaps, he'll be able to explain this to us himself, if we are fortunate enough to have him as a lecturer again. However, he mustn't suppose that this is in the nature of a presentation at all. How could it be? As the professor knows himself, it's not even a new bicycle. But it's a good one—one of the best on the market today—and I think our distinguished guest can vouch for that." His eyes met those of the professor's for an instant, and after a short pause he went on in a rather lower voice:

"If our funds had been in better shape, nothing would have given us more pleasure than to present him, here and now, with a brand-new one. As it is, we've made it almost like new again, and must simply ask if he will accept it as an inadequate but genuine expression of our gratitude—for the extra time he has spent amongst us, and for all the



energy he has put out on our behalf. It might come in useful, perhaps, for an odd time, on holiday, or even for another conference such as this one. We would all like to feel that he will come back again very soon on another, longer visit. Meantime—happy cycling !”

The professor was not aware of answering, any more than a man in a bad dream is aware of replying to the thundering voices of fate. But he gathered from the burst of applause that he had spoken a few words before climbing into the car. The return journey to the station was just as he had expected it to be, but for certain details which had been beyond his imagination at the time. He was escorted for some distance along the way by a drove of eager cyclists, but well to the fore came the smiling young man riding a bicycle which had the professor's own name, written in large letters for all to see on the labels. The car went very slowly on the rough roads towards the station, but the cyclists soon fell behind. Time and again, his driver winced sideways from the belligerent arm which the professor thrust out in order to consult his watch, but some little time went past before he noticed that both the fists of his passenger were clenched, and that certain veins, which hitherto he had only read of in novels as standing out, were there clearly marked on the professor's forehead.

“I wonder if you are aware how much it matters to me that I should catch this train ?” the menacing voice said closely to his ear after they had driven a mile or two in silence, interrupted only by a few faltering pleasantries from the young man. The professor was now leaning so close to him that he found some difficulty in lifting his elbows to the steering wheel.

“It is a matter of the greatest urgency,” the professor went on, pressing his sharp knees dangerously in amongst the brakes.

“If I don't get off on this train, I must ask to be driven the sixty miles to my destination. There will be no question of my waiting for a later train. It would be better for you, I think, if you accelerated now, and if you would keep quite silent while doing so.” There were no more words between them. The young man sat low in his seat and his neck was as rigid as a racing-motorist on the last mile of the track. Each time the car bounced his face grew pale, and on the roughest stretches it grew contorted, as though he carried a box of high explosives on the seat beside him.



They arrived very early for the train, and the professor had been in his seat for a good fifteen minutes before the cyclists came panting up alongside. There was just time for his bike to be taken to the luggage van, and he watched from the corridor, as with reassuring nods in his direction, they lifted it gently in—then lined up at the edge of the platform to wave goodbye as the train moved out. He noticed that the young man who had driven him to the station was not waving. There was a thoughtful, even a sad expression on his face, as though only lately had he looked down into the darker places of the human soul. The rest made a dash for their bicycles as the train drew out and the last glimpse he had of them was the flash of their wheels as they started pedalling furiously back the way they had come.

The professor was alone in the carriage. For a long time he sat quite still staring before him and trying to gather together some strength as the train gathered speed ; and like a patient intent on some kind of therapeutic treatment, he concentrated simply on the vibrations which travelled up from the soles of his feet, planted at last firmly on the floor of the carriage, and down the length of his spine where, even through the plushy back of the seat, he could feel the powerful drag of the engine, now going full steam ahead. Still he sat on, only opening his eyes occasionally to stare sideways out at the smoke which coiled past his window, stained green in the afternoon light, or up above him at the luggage rack where his bulging briefcase bounced gently on top of his suitcase. Everything was again in rhythmical motion. He had only to lean back to be regenerated ; simply by laying his hand along the hot, vibrating seat he would be revived.

But something still stood in the way of recovery ; and though his mind, trained rigorously over the years to reject what was superfluous, made a tremendous effort to dispel this, he was unsuccessful. For it was not only contained in his head. He knew that at the far end of the train, moving to the rhythm of the heavy wheels which carried him swiftly away from unpleasant memories, another pair of wheels, bearing his name, bounded lightly but triumphantly along with him.

# *An Hour in a Museum*

BY GORDON MEYER

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**I**N what particularly are we interested here? A number of things. To begin with, that tall, red conical . . . But the simplest way, of course, is to take the catalogue, and tick the items. Even in a list of objects or names there can be a certain poetry. Unfortunately, this justification does not get us anywhere; there is no catalogue. The last one, printed many years ago, has, they tell us, been lost. We are thus thrown back on our own resources. To begin with, then . . .

The olfactory nerves always seem to win by a split moment the race to communicate new sense data to the brain; and the first thing striking us, as we pass through the very tall doors of this old house is the peculiar, musty odour on the furniture of other centuries; in this case, heavy, stifling, and sparking an instantaneous contact with the South America of the seventeenth century, its pomp, its cruelties, its darkness. It is an odour such as only Spain and her manner of practising her religion has given to the world.

Here in the dim room there is a heavy, round, dark table made from the trunk of a jacaranda tree; there, an elaborate and ponderous commode of cedar wood, flaunting the carved symbol of the crown of Spain. Over here—and how hollowly ring our footsteps on the cold mosaic—grotesque carvings of the Jesuit missionaries, of little value, save historical, and to those of a curious turn of mind; hideous crucifixes, the waxen-coloured bodies running with life-like blackening blood. All these things are drenched in an aura of cruelty and suffering; of men waiting in the dark; of wordless endurance; and of something still not satisfactorily explainable three centuries later to the indigenous people of this continent.

Before becoming nauseated, then, we turn, to face a century nearer our own; the century of certitude, the solution of the cosmological problem, the self-confidence of learned men; and the renaissance of

medieval narrow-mindedness—redeemed just in time—that made it all possible. In dismay we survey its trash as represented by these musty rooms in the heart of South America. What is there of value here that can be retrieved and recorded? We are like a man swinging the lead—this is true also in the figurative sense. We should not be here; we cast it; the line runs through our hand, and, after a long time, strikes. Slowly we heave in, and examine the tallow for a sample of the bottom. And out of the darkness of an old glass case one object stares at us; a tall, red conical 'gorra,' the hat of a cavalry officer who fought against the Dictator. It belongs, says the ticket, to Don Miguel someone or other, who was born in 1820; and it excites the imagination, like an empty chair approached suddenly by the camera in a strange film. But the tall hat's real interest lies in the access it gives to the wearer. Who was this Don Miguel who put on this peculiar hat every morning? What did he do? In what did he believe? It so happens that we have seen his counterpart, perhaps even himself, in many badly drawn—and in some way perhaps more interesting—pictures of savage red-uniformed cavalry tearing over the gently undulating landscape which begins where this little riverside town ends. And the crude lances which they used with such skill and ferocity stand, some of them at least, against this wall here.

Back again, then, to cruelty and ferocity. The very chairs—here is an old one, upholstered in red silk damask, the Dictator's colour—are redolent with the thoughts of the men who sat in them, thoughts of men dedicated to exterminating each other (that terrible Spanish word 'degollando' sounds in the mind), some for ideas, some for objects. Such thoughts were uppermost in their minds in all their waking hours. The documents of this epoch—there are some on display here—nearly all begin with such words as '*Viva la Confederación Argentina! Mueran los salvajes, asquerosos, inmundos unitarios! Muera el loco traidor, salvaje unitario, Urquiza!*' (Long live the Argentine Confederation! Death to the savage, filthy, dirty, Unitarians! Death to the mad traitor, the savage Unitarian, Urquiza!) They meant it. The outcome of it all is that Urquiza, hideously sculptured with his gigantic horse, blocks, from the intersection of two of the capital's most beautiful avenues, the view to a large part of the universe; and that Rosas died in Swaythling.

### *An Hour in a Museum*

But we turn away, to lighten the atmosphere. Anything will do; even—as it lies handy—the visitors' book. It is accordingly opened, and found to be thick with entries, mostly collective, and monothematic. 'On the 20th of September twenty-three pupils of the school of La Asunción de Nuestra Señora visited the museum . . . imperishable memories . . . courteous attention . . . an inspiration to our children . . . unforgettable morning . . .' Idly we add our own names, but without comment. It is an error, for which we are to pay later.

Meanwhile, turning to face another wall, we find an old census of the year 1803. The whole province—it is the size of Scotland—contained then some 132,000 people of various nationalities. How many English? Down the column our eyes drop; down, down, but what a long way down; but at last: here we are—or were—483 of us. And Scots: 3. And, right at the foot of the document, Chinese: 1. In 1803, at least, so our history says, the English were at it again with the French, the Scots were busy sawing off the top half of Scotland; and the Chinese, of course, were multiplying. And now we have happily stumbled on the most interesting phenomenon so far this afternoon: one sole Chinaman in this huge mesopotamia thousands and thousands of leagues from China. How did he get along? How did the poor fellow ever get here? And what did he find to do? The Chinese, it is known, are adept at multiplying; but one Chinese multiplied by one is still one. Arithmetically, therefore, his social intercourse must have been zero. The Scots, although only three, will at least have been able to speak to each other, and perhaps even entertain themselves in some triangular fashion; the four hundred and eighty-three English will also have been able to converse with each other (though some doubt exists as to whether they actually did). But the poor Chinaman, solitary on the littoral, perhaps with no Spanish at all, we see him alone and palely loitering by the wide river's margin, his pile of washing under his arm. But whose washing? Everyone lived so far away from each other, he would never have made a business of it. A poet, then—exiled, perhaps, for bettering K'ien-lung, his Emperor, at verses, and translating the willow crowned islands noisy with unseen birds' calls into delicate ideographs. Yet, if he sung such things,

he himself was unsung, for there seems to exist no other record of him, save the figure 1. No, he must have been a cook and his name Ah Wong. And yet, whatever his life in this turbulent province, he probably thought it all very funny.

Our spirits lightened, we turn our eyes to an oval portrait hanging above an old piano patented by Mr. John Broadwood of London. The portrait is of a young girl of a Burne-Jones type of beauty. Her long hair flows over one side of her face, where it is knotted. Above this knot is another—the knot of a large white handkerchief. The handkerchief is bound over her eyes. Why? The ticket states her name to be Camila O'Gorman, executed on the 18th of August, 1848. Her mouth is slightly parted. What had this girl of Irish descent done that she should be blindfolded, and, with parted lips, await a volley of bullets? We imagine that she delivered her people to the enemy, or, we hope, helped her own to escape. For what else would make sense? Whatever it was, we are back to violence again, this time with a large question mark rampant in the mind: Why doesn't the ticket tell us?

Outside, the warm rain falls steadily over the town, over the island studded river, and over the rolling savannas beyond. We are here whether we like it or not. Another look round, then.

A tiny antique pistol with four barrels. No, not now. A case full of seals. No; they are as thick here as in the Shetlands. An old spherical grenade, seventy kilos, its mouth open, the circular lip curling over—it comes from a French brigantine which ventured some thousand kilometres up the river; and an old 'corneta,' the little horn used by the horse-tram drivers. They tell us . . . what? That men like to fight; and that if a four-barrelled pistol is not enough, a seventy-kilo grenade will do the job; that men are more likely to keep their promises, until they have signed, sealed, and delivered them, when their one desire is to discover a way out of them; and finally that they feel absolved from responsibility, if before running someone over they give a little toot on a cow-horn. Nothing new; nothing very old.

On the wall again. There is on the wall at this point a collection of hopelessly bad nineteenth century portraits in oil—so bad, that the artists have preferred anonymity to criticism. But the pictures

are interesting. From the shadows of their dirty, cracked canvases their expressionless faces look out at us and their bodies are wrapped in the heavy, suffocating clothes that did to the body what the morals did to the mind. Although execrably painted, their faces, like the faces on the canvases of Goya and Zurbarán, stare and stare, and seem to say : ' Look as long as you like at us, but our secret you will never discover.'

To get at their minds—that is what would be interesting. But we have to wade through this bric-à-brac. Perhaps the house itself, then, will tell something. The high walls, behind their drapings of bullet-riddled flags and fans of long crude lances, are cracked ; the ceiling leaks ; plaster is falling ; and the immensely tall windows are suddenly swung open by a little Indian boy, and we see, as if in a picture frame, an ancient tram, the colour of stale mustard, and exiled long ago by the great republic in the north, clanking down the cobbled street to the river. These two, the boy and the tram, are living and moving, and if we continue to regard them it is impossible not to wonder what they will do next. But the boy idly shuts and bolts the tall window, which, it is now realised, he was cleaning ; and with a start we find we are back in the past, in the world of passive things, dead things. We are being regarded—so it seems, for the room has now become a little dusky—by a figure in a dark blue uniform, belted and with a wide red stripe down the trouser legs. Yet ' regarded ' is not the word ; for the figure's képi rests on top of its trunk. It has no head. Motionless the uniform stands there, on its dummy, in the gloomy room. Once the uniform moved this way, that way, the arm lifted (in salute), dropped (in signal for execution), and the body at night presumably got out of it. But now it will stay on a dummy, to inspire children with imperishable memories, and provide schoolmistresses with unforgettable mornings, until it rots. It is in fact rotting now, as everything else is, only the process is indiscernible : our eyes are not geared so low.

By the dummy's side a marble slab declares : ' Here lies Juan de Dios Rãmos ' (which is untrue : behind it is only an old drain pipe). ' Pious souls ' (begs his widow) ' pray for his rest.'

We prepare to leave, but we have forgotten that casual entry with the Biro. The ' Directora ' of the museum has sighted it ; and now



she has sighted us. So we have come all that distance—we were foolish enough to put the city of our birth—to see the museum? Yes. (It is true in a way.) And we are interested in the museum? Yes, of course. (For we're interested in everything: that's our whole cursed trouble.) Well, in what particularly are we interested here?

It had to come. The questions have narrowed, have become—to borrow a simile from the wall—a lance-head. The question for us however is, How to parry the thrust? How to answer that one, the only difficult, the inevitable one? If we invent something, we will be borne away, struggling with a flood of specialist's questions. (Besides, why should we disguise the fact that we are not specialists?) If we answer, 'Just in what we see'—the whole truth—we shall be held to be flippant. And if we say, 'The three Scotsmen, and especially the one lonely, little Chinaman,' the 'Directora' will discover in our reply the confirmation that the English are mad. (For unfortunately we are, in this sort of situation, as every traveller to distant longitudes knows.) We decide then to tell the truth, but not the whole truth. We want to know why Camila O'Gorman was shot.

The moment the question is uttered, we know it to have been foolishly uttered. For it is not answered; it is evaded. The 'Directora' talks about other things, and while she does, Camila O'Gorman steps to the front, exciting, where before she had merely stirred our curiosity.

So finally we say . . . something or other; we've forgotten what it was now; the point is not the words, but that they add up politely to nothing; and, as we walk back in the rain to the shabby 'pension'—it has been raining all day, by the way: the reason for our having entered the museum—we have of course to face up to the question ourselves.

As a personal question, it has no interest here; but suddenly, as we enter a street thickly carpeted in violet from the fallen jacaranda leaves at this moment being crushed by a lumbering cart, it seems to be much more than a personal question.

So, back in our room, brushing an enormous spider off the flimsy table, keeping firmly in position the Paraguayan palm hat against the arrival of others, we begin picking over the remains of the hour in the museum. After shovelling off the specialist's dross, we find



*An Hour in a Museum*

ourselves left with : three Scotsmen, one solitary Chinaman, and Camila O'Gorman, who, so a young lawyer in the room on the patio's other side tells us—was, with her lover, shot by order of the Dictator. Why ? Because her lover was a priest. (The young lawyer then uttered a reflection on the Holy Inquisition which caused him to be invited to dinner.) It also emerges, as one of man's joking contributions to reality, that the scene of the execution, Santos Lugares, means Holy Places.

Lighting a long cigar, then, to repel insectile boarders, we pull the table towards us over the bare planks, and do our best to answer in these few inadequate words the 'Directora's' question : In what particularly are we interested here ? And perhaps what would best repay effort, we finally decide, would be an excavation into the 'Directora's' reticence over the 'crime' of Camila O'Gorman. For that sudden stop, that shrinking from an unexpectedly disclosed gap in the calm flow of social intercourse has revealed something : perhaps an ideologic corollary to the concrete objects examined. The lead with which we are taking our soundings in the past is suddenly found to be dangling over a submarine precipice—how many centuries deep ?

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